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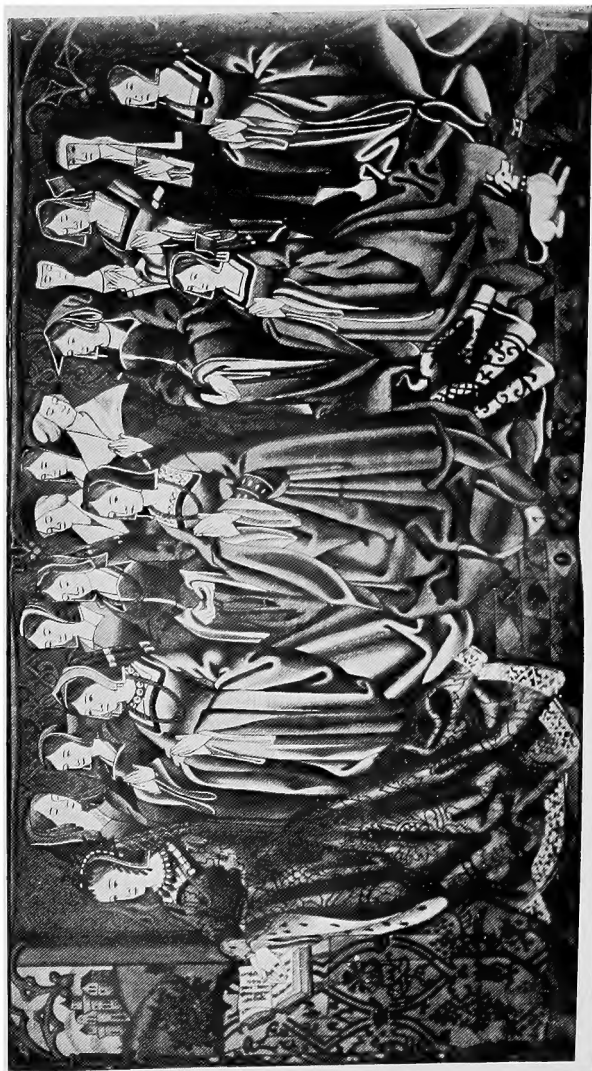
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PORTION OF THE TAPESTRY, S. MARY'S HALL,
SHOWING MARGARET OF ANJOU AND HER LADIES.

Social England Series

EDITED BY KENELM D. COTES, M.A. (OXON)

LIFE IN AN OLD ENGLISH TOWN

A HISTORY OF COVENTRY FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES
COMPILED FROM OFFICIAL RECORDS

BY

MARY DORMER HARRIS



London

SWAN SONNENSCHN & CO. LIM^D

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ERRATA

p. 67 *note* 1, for "*Laud. MS.* 290 d. 533" read "*Lansd. MS.*
290 f. 553."

p. 131 l. 9, for "*Calaudon*" read "*Caludon*."

p. 180 *note* 2 l. 1, for "*August*" read "*Augusti*."

„ „ l. 2, for "*Anglief uit*." read "*Anglie fuit*."

p. 187 l. 11, for "*wail*" read "*way*."

p. 296 l. 28, for "*council*" read "*counsel*."

EDITORIAL PREFACE

**A New
Subject.**

IN introducing an old subject with some variety of form, it is easy to be brief and at the same time clear, because the reader supplies from previous knowledge so much that is left unsaid; but in stepping quite out of the beaten track nothing perhaps but actually treading the new path can make the goal that it is intended to reach plainly visible. It is not desirable that the whole object of a new series of books written on a new plan should be capable of being condensed into a few pages; this can be done only for subjects whose scope is already well defined, where there are and have been many previous books written on the same lines, though perhaps from slightly different points of view, and in which the only novelty to be looked for is in the style of writing and in the arrangement and amount of matter.

Personality.

Undoubted as is the influence of personality upon history, the attention directed to it has hitherto been rather one-sided; the entire course of national life cannot be summed up in a few great names, and the attempt to do so is to confuse biography with history. This narrow view, besides ignoring other causes, leads to the overrating of details, and since a cause must be found somewhere, personal character becomes every-

thing. The stability of law that is seen in a large number of instances cannot be discovered by watching single lives, however exalted ; and history with no intention of discovering the condition of events becomes the sport of accident, resting in great measure for its interest on anecdote and rhetoric.

Politics. The case is not much bettered by long accounts of acts of parliament, with summaries of debates, and numbering of divisions, and more lives of statesmen, eminent and mediocre. The details of parliament no more than the details of biographies afford sufficient data for scientific observation, if the forces of the society that surround them are omitted. Neither does the addition of military detail help much in the comprehension of the course of events ; one battle is much like another except when treated by the professional soldier or sailor, or at all events in the light of professional books ; and victories or defeats depend upon something else besides the position of the ground or the plans of the moment. It has been reserved for a naval expert of another power to point this out to the multitudinous writers of the history of the great naval power of the world.

Social Questions. Social questions are to-day taking the foremost place in public interest ; the power behind the statesman is seen to be greater in controlling contemporary history than the eloquence or experience of any single man. We see this to be so now, and our knowledge of the present suggests the question whether it has not always been so ; and whether the life of society

though it has not had the same comparative weight, has not always been a more important factor than the life of the individual.

The "Social
England"
Series.

The "Social England" series rests upon the conviction that it is possible to make a successful attempt to give an account, not merely of politics and wars, but also of religion, commerce, art, literature, law, science, agriculture, and all that follows from their inclusion, and that without a due knowledge of the last we have no real explanation of any of the number.

Not as an
Appendix.

But the causes that direct the course of events will become no clearer if to one third politics and one third wars we add another third consisting of small portions of other subjects, side by side, but yet apart from one another.

The Central
Idea.

The central idea is that the greatness or weakness of a nation does not depend on the greatness or weakness of any one man or body of men, and that the odd millions have always had their part to play. To understand how great that was and is, we must understand the way in which they spent their lives, what they really cared for, what they fought for, and in a word what they lived for. To leave out nine-tenths of the national life, and to call the rest a history of the nation, is misleading; it is so misleading that, treated in this mutilated manner, history has no pretension to be a science: it becomes a ponderous chronicle, full of details which, in the absence of any other guiding principle, are held together by chronology. Writers of great name and

power escape from this limitation, which, however, holds sway for the most part in the books that reach the great majority of readers, that is those who have not time to read an epoch in several volumes.

The Carrying Out of the Idea. It is not necessary in seeing a famous town to visit every public building and private house, and so for the carrying out of this plan it has been determined that adequate treatment can be secured of certain subjects in a series of books that should be popular, not only in style, but also in the demands they make upon the reader's time.

Specialists. It would be useless for any one writer to pretend to accomplish this task, though when the way is cleared a social history connecting more closely and summarising the work of all the contributors will be possible; but at present it is intended to ask each of them to bring his special knowledge to bear upon the explanation of social life and in treating his portion of the work to look at original authorities to see not merely what light they throw on his own branch separately, but how they affect its conception considered in relation to the whole, that is to the development of the life of the English people.

The Possible Limits of the Series. To bring the series to its completion will need the services of many writers. A few of the number of books which might be suggested may be mentioned. The influence upon thought of geographical discovery, of commerce, and of science would form three volumes. The part inventions have played, the main changes in political theories and, perhaps less

commonplace, the main changes in English thought upon great topics, such as the social position of women, of children, and of the church, the treatment of the indigent poor and of the criminal, need all to be studied. The soldier, the sailor, the lawyer, the physician, have still to be written of; the conception of the duties of the noble or the statesman, not in the story of one man's life, but in a general theory illustrated from the lives of many men, has still to be formulated; the wide range of subjects connected with law—the story of crime, laws made in class interest, laws for the protection of trade and for the regulation of industry—are all to be found in the statutes at large. A more comprehensive sketch of the scope of the series should be found in an introductory volume.

Works already
Arranged for. But, apart from the probable extension of the series, sufficient works have already been arranged for to describe some leading features of English social life, and to point out some of the numerous highways which lead to a great centre, passing through different provinces, which all have their local colour, but the lives of whose inhabitants need also to be known if we are to understand the country as a whole, and not merely the court and parliament of the capital.

The King's
Place. The king is the centre of this life when war and justice form the chief reason for the loose federation of communities; not merely does he give protection on the frontiers, but among his own subjects it is more and more his duty to enforce peace, and we have to see how step by step the local court or franchise is merged in the strengthening of sovereign justice.

What exactly was the ideal of knighthood?

Chivalry.

How far did it imply an acquaintance with the learning of the day and with foreign countries? Did it strengthen the feeling of pity for the weak, or purify the love for women? In what are wrongly called the dark ages, was there a vast society of men of culture, who spread over large parts of Northern Europe, to whom we owe the first-fruits of modern literature, the troubadours, who first came from Provence?

The Troubadours.

In the manor is to be found the story of early village life, of domestic manufactures, of the system of agriculture and of the simplest administration of justice, a system the remains of which last till to-day; while a sketch of the history of the working-classes helps to complete the picture, and at the same time to place a wider one beside it, to show especially how wages have been regulated, the condition under which the poor have lived, and to see what on the whole is the part they have played in history.

The Manor.

The Working-man.

Turning from the working-man, we naturally ask when arose the great class of merchants, how their gradual rise affected the condition of the population, whether their appearance synchronised with any other political and social events, and in fact we prepare for the question as to the influence of commerce on politics and society.

The Rise of the Merchants.

The Universities.

Those who know the part that commerce plays in civilization are aware that the

growth of intercourse will naturally bring larger culture, and the learning of the old world and of the Saracens will be taught in the schools of the West. It will be impossible to rigidly confine the currents of thought to the four seas, or even only to break the barrier here and there by such stories as that of the Roman missionaries. England must be looked on as belonging to the circle of a great civilization. How far Englishmen went abroad, and how far the men of other nations came to England, requires to be set forth.

**The Travelled
Englishman
and the
Traveller in
England.**

Again, to those who believe in the organic connection of all branches of the national life it will be of interest to learn in what way the character of art partook of the nature of life around it, how far its methods or motives can be borrowed, why the fifteenth century gave pause to our art, why at a certain period cathedrals ceased to be built, and when it was we added great names in our turn to the list of painters.

The music of Anglo-Saxon and of Dane will to some make clearer the influence of skald and gleeman; the effect of poetry will be noted, the growth of instruments, and the increasing complexity of music.

Possibly the change in the landscape might be described: the alteration in the face of the country with the draining of fens, the making of roads, and the clearing of forests; the introduction of fresh trees and plants.

**The Influence
of Geography
on Social Life.**

We must recognise that the position of Great Britain, as the known world grew wider, altered for the better; the effect of rivers,

mountains, and seas in fixing the boundaries of kingdoms and sub-kingdoms, in altering or preserving languages, in determining politics and the opinions of districts, and, the chief point of all, in deciding the character of what bids fair to be the language of commerce, and probably of all international communication.

The Homes
and Household
Implements. As it is important to know where men lived in relation to the world at large in order to understand how they lived, so we should be acquainted with their dwelling-places, whether in town or country, at any period; we should observe the changing styles of building, distinguish the international influence, the part that the facility of obtaining material played, and notice the gradual evolution of the rooms, the way that they were adorned and furnished, to see how far in beds and baths, in the provision for study and privacy, civilization was advancing.

Social England
Classics. From their literature we can gather most, for here, with not much thought of history, contemporary spoke to contemporary of what each knew well. In the pre-Elizabethan drama we can see the natural touches that show it was not elaborated as an exercise, but with the intention of possessing a living interest, and in what interested them we discover their attitude, not merely to religion, but to much else besides. By recognizing this fact we learn that masterpieces of literature lose their full meaning unless we find in them, besides creative power and command of the technique of art, "the very age and body of the time." Shakespeare's England and Chaucer's England are what Shakespeare

and Chaucer knew of life; the outer gallery of pictures the unknown artists drew, from which we pass into the inner rooms whose walls are covered by the groups and figures that the masters painted.

Biography and History. In this widening of history, biography is no longer cramped by being cut off from social life; the great men are not isolated, but take their proper places among their fellow-countrymen, their lives forming fit landmarks, because they are akin to the people among whom they live, their characters not adapted to the century of the commentator, but bearing the impress of the forces round them, whose constant pressure is part of their life. They and those who are lesser than themselves, and the changing conditions that create them and are modified by them, form the great and continuous whole, which constantly alters, as all life alters, coming from the past and linked to the future. It no longer becomes necessary to make all times alike, except for constitutional changes, or improvement in weapons, and the crowning or death of a king, pleading the half-truth that human nature is the same in every age.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It is impossible to mention by name all those who have helped to forward the work of collecting materials for this history. I have to thank Mr. Browett, late town clerk of Coventry, and Mr. Beard, the present holder of the office, first, for permission to examine the MS. records belonging to the corporation; and secondly, for the unfailing courtesy and consideration they and their assistants showed me while I was engaged at this task. Mrs. J. R. Green knows that I am grateful for the encouragement she gave me to continue the work, and for help which her wide knowledge in the subject of Town History made invaluable in the solution of many difficulties. Miss L. Toulmin Smith gave me her kind assistance in correcting the proofs, and the Editor of this series was good enough to make some useful suggestions while the work was in progress. I am indebted to the kindness of Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co. for permission to reprint here my article on "Laurence Saunders, Citizen of Coventry," which appeared in the *English Historical Review*, vol. ix. 633-651, while through the courtesy of the Executive Committee of the Society of Antiquaries I have been enabled to include a paper on the "Craft Guilds of Coventry," read before the Society on Nov. 21, 1895 (*Proc. S. A. L.* 2 S. xvi. 15) in this book.

MARY DORMER HARRIS.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

LEOFRIC AND GODIVA

	PAGE
Coventry — Early legends — Early history — Foundation of the monastery — The Confessor's charter — Riches of the minster — Legend of Godiva — Story of Leofric's career and family	1-11

CHAPTER II

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

The neighbouring country — The monastic orders — Life in a mediæval monastery — The <i>obedientiarii</i> and their work — Hospitality — Lawsuits and journeys undertaken by monks — The bishops and the monks — Abbacy vested in bishop Livesey — His greed — Nunant — Expulsion of the monks — Their return — Feud with the canons about episcopal elections — King John and the Coventry monks — Peace made between monks and canons — Capitular elections a mere form in later times — Place of monastic orders in town history	12-30
--	-------

CHAPTER III

THE CHESTER LORDSHIP

Coventry in <i>Domesday</i> — The Earl's-half passes to the earls of Chester — Character of an English feudal lord — Earl Gernons' stormy career — Earl Hugh takes part in the rebellion of 1173 — Earl Blondvil's career and fame — The story of his death and the "mastiffs" of Dieulacres — Coventry passes to the De Montalt family	31-39
---	-------

CHAPTER IV

THE BEGINNINGS OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

	PAGE
The winning of liberties by towns on secular and ecclesiastical estates — Backwardness of churchmen in granting liberties — Condition of serfs — Coventry men “free burghers” — Their masters: king, prior, and earl — Blondvil’s charter — Liberties modelled on those of Lincoln — Importance of town courts — Cases before the portmanmote — The county court — Henry II.’s confirmation of the charter — Growth of Coventry — Grant of a fair — Coming of the friars	40-52

CHAPTER V

PRIOR’S-HALF AND EARL’S-HALF

Struggle for liberty — Division of the town into two estates — Frequency of these divisions — Disputes bred by difference of customs in neighbouring manors — Quarrels between Earl’s-men and Prior’s-men in Coventry — Union of the two estates — The disputes continue — The merchant guild — The question of the market — Decision in the prior’s favour — The story of the magician — The trial of the citizens for witchcraft — Their acquittal	53-68
--	-------

CHAPTER VI

THE SEIGNIORY OF THE PRIOR AND QUEEN
ISABELLA

Defeat of tenants on ecclesiastical estates — Isabella enters into possession as heir of the De Montalts — Feud between the queen and prior — The prior complains of wrong done by the Earl’s-men — The Coventry men gain liberty — Their victory in the incorporation of the city — Dispute closed by the “Indenture Tripartite”	69-77
---	-------

CHAPTER VII

THE CORPORATION AND THE GUILDS

PAGE

Ignorance and apathy concerning local affairs at the present time—Decline of municipal institutions—Powers of a mediæval corporation—Organization of municipal affairs at Coventry after the purchase of the charter of incorporation—Fresh grants of liberties—Municipal rule takes the form of an oligarchy—History of guilds—The guild merchant of S. Mary—Union of the guilds under the name of the Trinity—Connection of the guilds and corporation—Influence, wealth, and dignity of the town officials—Their busy lives	78-105
--	--------

CHAPTER VIII

THE CORPORATION AND THE COMMONALTY

The grievances of the loaf and pastures—The common and Lammas lands—The council of the Forty-eight becomes an instrument of tyranny—The question of petitions to the leet—Whether they furthered popular control—Presentments to leet—Whether they furthered popular control—Fresh liberties—Confusion in municipal finances the result of the Wars of the Roses—General complaints—Edward IV.'s attack on the city liberties—Manifestations of internal discontent	106-127
---	---------

CHAPTER IX

COVENTRY AND THE KINGDOM OF ENGLAND

Obscurity of Coventry under early kings—Isabella and the friars—The Norfolk duel—Preparations for a king's visit—Purveyance—Lodging of the king's retinue—Privilege of sanctuary—Faulkes de Breauté—John Ball taken at Coventry—His teaching—The "Unlearned Parliament"—Attack on the Church—Lack of reverence to the Sacrament—The king as borrower—Prince Hal in Coventry—The preaching of the hermit—Lollardism in Coventry—Penance and death of martyrs—Loans to the king for the French War—Presents for the royal princes	123-146
---	---------

CHAPTER X

THE RED AND THE WHITE ROSE

PAGE

General character of the period—Local warfare and lawsuits—	
Influence of the duke of Buckingham in the Midlands—	
Coventry Lancastrian—Fortification of the city—Visit of	
Henry VI. to the city—Graciousness of king Henry—His visit	
and offering to S. Michael's church—The king's farewell	
promise—The new charter—Outbreak of the war—Battle	
of S. Alban's—Reception of queen Margaret—John Wedarby	
prepares a pageant—Margaret is hailed as "Mother of	
Meekness"—Council held at Coventry—Fray between the	
watch and the duke of Somerset's men—Queen Margaret's	
sudden visit—She insists on receiving the same honours as	
the king—The Court again at Coventry—The queen sees the	
Corpus Christi plays—The supper at Richard Wood's—Progress	
of the war—Lancastrian triumph—The "Diabolical Parlia-	
ment"—Coventry cools towards Lancaster—Henry reproaches	
the inhabitants—Battle of Northampton—Coventry joins York	
—Welcome to Edward IV.	147-173

CHAPTER XI

LAST STRUGGLE BETWEEN YORK AND LAN-
CASTER—THE TUDORS

Estrangement of Warwick from Edward IV.—Their different views on foreign policy—Renewal of the war in the north under Robin of Redesdale—Warwick's communication to the men of Coventry—The battle of Edgecote—Edward a prisoner at Coventry—Execution of the Woodvilles on Gosford Green—Welles' rebellion in Lincolnshire—Warwick is implicated in the rebellion—Flight of Clarence and Warwick—Warwick espouses the cause of Lancaster, and drives the king from England—Chronicle of the year—Lancastrian restoration—Edward invades England—Offers battle at Coventry—The King-maker at Coventry—Clarence's desertion—Confiscation of the city's liberties—Clarence's mediation—Welcome to prince Edward—Edward's subsequent dealings with Coventry—Richard III.

	PAGE
tries to ingratiate himself with the citizens—Welcome to Henry VII.—The king's visit to the city—Simmel's rebellion—Money for war—Empson recorder—Chronicle of the death of Henry VII.—Loans and troubles—Plots—The Reformation—Destruction of the churches—Dissolution of the guilds and chantries—Poverty and decay of the city under the Tudors—The purchase of the guild lands—Puritan Coventry . . .	174-205

CHAPTER XII

THE LAMMAS LANDS

John Bristowe lord of Whitley Manor—His encroachments upon the common land—He claims right of common with the citizens of Coventry—The corporation take revenge on William Bristowe—The mayor and commonalty take possession of the field—The disturbance about the "Prior's Waste"—The quarrel with Bristowe continues—Arbitration is tried—The "letter testimonial" of the "aged men"—Temporary settlement of the quarrel—Early career of Laurence Saunders—He is elected chamberlain—He complains of encroachment and surcharging to the prince of Wales—The journey to Ludlow—Decision against Laurence—He submits—The prior takes offence—His complaint—The mayor's reply—The prior's rejoinder—Bristowe again—Appeal to Ludlow—The commons rise—The king censures the rioters—Conclusion of the quarrel with Bristowe—Laurence renews his complaint—He is committed to prison—Death of the recorder—Robert Green's enactments—Rules concerning apprentices—The sale of cloth—Laurence Saunders' words on Lammas day—The verses on the church door—The corporation appeal to the recorder—Laurence has hopes of the Court—Fresh verses—The suit is tried in the Star Chamber—Laurence vanishes into the Fleet 206-252

CHAPTER XIII

THE COMPANIES OF THE CRAFTS

The woollen industry in Coventry—The Drapery the selling place for cloth—The method of searching the cloth—The drapers—Power of the merchant class—The subjection of the crafts to

	PAGE
the corporation—The fullers and dyers—The workers in iron— Resistance of the crafts—Self-seeking of the crafts—Regula- tions affecting apprentices—The combinations of the workmen suppressed—Rivalry between the cappers and their work- men—Survival of certain companies	253-281

CHAPTER XIV

DAILY LIFE IN THE TOWN—THE MERCHANTS AND THE MARKET

Life in the city by day and night—Types of individuals, hermits, pilgrims, the alchemist—Punishment of crime, stocks, pillory, gaol, the gallows, heads of traitors—Sanitary measures— Measures taken against fire—The deceits of traders and victu- allers—The assize of bread and ale—The regulation of market traffic—The country merchant—The Corpus Christi fair— Men and merchandise—The mayor's court of Statute Mer- chant—The travels of the merchant—Inns—The Botoners—The Onleys—Perils by land and sea—Laurence Cook and the Hanseatic merchants—Adventure of Mr. Wheatley's servant— Benefactions of the Coventry merchants—Bond, Ford, Haddon, Sir Thomas White—The school and schoolmasters—Education in the Middle Ages—Problems of poverty—The sturdy vaga- bond	282-318
--	---------

CHAPTER XV

DAILY LIFE IN THE TOWN—RELIGION AND AMUSEMENTS OF THE TOWNSFOLK

The city churches—Uses to which churches were put—A hospital in time of plague—Provision for services and prayers—The chapels of the crafts—The burial oblations—Monks and friars quarrel about the funeral candles—Amusements, archery, bull- baiting, strolling players—Illicit amusements, hunting and hawking—Brawling—The affair of the Staffords and Har- courts—Lawlessness on feast days—Quarrels among the citizens—Feasting among the guilds and crafts—Rejoicings on Midsummer eve and S. Peter's night—The riding of the
--

	PAGE
armed watch—Processions—Mystery plays—Royal visits—Contributions of each craft towards the pageants—Care bestowed on preparations for the plays—The performances of the crafts not identical with the so-called “Coventry Plays”—Subjects of the performances of the Coventry crafts—The actors—Strange figures among the <i>dramatis personæ</i> —Pageants for the welcome of royalty—Hox Tuesday—The waits—The common labour of the town—Commissions of array and muster of soldiers—Hiring of recruits—An inconvenient business—Civic patriotism and civic art—General character of the English burgher	319-357

CHAPTER XVI

OLD COVENTRY AT THE PRESENT DAY

How to spend a day in Coventry, and what to see there—Celebrated inhabitants—Ford’s Hospital—S. Michael’s—S. Mary’s Hall—Window, roof, tapestry—Trinity Church—Cathedral Ruins—Old Grammar School—S. John’s—Bond’s Hospital	358-376
---	---------

APPENDICES

On the MS. Authorities Employed	377
LIST OF AUTHORITIES Cited in this Work	378
INDEX	381

I

LEOFRIC AND GODIVA

It was ever the boast of Coventry men that their city was of "high fame and antiquity,"¹ being "remembered," so John Throgmorton, the recorder, assured queen Elizabeth, "by Polydore Vergil to be of . . . small account in the time of king Arviragus (which was forty-four years after our Saviour) in the emperor Claudius' time."² And Shakespeare's contemporary, Michael Drayton, had a pretty fancy of his own concerning the place,³ whereby its antiquity is made manifest. He tells us how, when Coventry was but "a poor thatched village," the saint of Cologne brought thither

"That goodly virgin-band
Th' eleven thousand maids, chaste Ursula's command,"

who at departing,

"Each by her just bequest,
Some special virtue gave, ordaining it to rest
With one of her own sex ;"

which special virtues, the poet adds, were in aftertimes

¹ Harl. MS. 6,195 f. 7. Petition of the men of Coventry concerning the possessions of the Corpus Christi guild.

² Poole, *Coventry*, 90. Elizabeth visited the city in 1565.

³ *Polyolbion*, XIII.

bestowed on Godiva, "that most princely dame," who freed Coventry from toll on the occasion of her famous ride.

But of all this history tells us nothing, even as it tells us nothing of Vespasian's visit to Exeter, or the founding of London by Brutus of Troy, in the days when the foundations of Rome were not laid. Coventry is not old in the sense wherein we apply the word to Colchester, York, Bath or Winchester, and many towns dating from Roman or early Saxon times. If the site of the present city were ever occupied by the Romans—and the point is a doubtful one—their occupation left no permanent traces.¹ But just as families love to boast of a high and noble ancestry, so dwellers in cities and members of institutions delight to trace their origins back to a legendary past, and the fables of Brut, who came from Troy to London, or the story of Memprie, contemporary of David, and founder of the university of Oxford,² were once accepted as truth. We, however, are content to leave this record of obscure beginnings unexplored, confessing that we have, as Dugdale says, "so little light of story to guide us through those elder times."³

In truth, we hear nothing authentic concerning the

¹ Mr. Fretton informs me that some rough Roman (?) pavement was discovered in the Cross Cheaping during excavations at the end of the last century. This was probably a portion of the Welsh Road.

² Rashdall, *Universities*, II. pt. ii. 323.

³ Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 134.

Romans', and but rumours of the Danes', coming to Coventry. In 1016 the Northmen, led by Canute and the traitor Eadric Streona, laid waste the Midlands, and are said to have destroyed a nunnery on the spot founded by an obscure Saxon saint, the virgin Osburg, who probably came from the neighbouring house for nuns at Polesworth.¹ But S. Osburg is a shadowy figure, and the memory of her foundation has almost entirely passed away. The convent of the "convent town,"² did not gather together there until the middle of the eleventh century, when Leofric, earl of Mercia, and his wife Godiva, built a dwelling for an abbot and twenty-four monks to live under the rule of S. Benedict. Thus was laid the first stone of a monastery which ranked with the Confessor's abbey of Westminster, king Harold's college at Waltham, and the twin abbeys built by William I. and Matilda in their city of Caen, among the most famous foundations of that age. The monastery became the nucleus of a thriving town in later days, as was the case with Bury S. Edmund's, Abingdon, Reading, S. Alban's, and many other places in England.

The chroniclers, as well as the monks of Coventry, loved to honour the memory of Leofric and Godiva,

¹ Such is Mr. Fretton's opinion. Rous, the fifteenth century antiquary, is Dugdale's authority for the statement concerning the nunnery.

² A convent is properly a *body* of monks or nuns; a monastery or nunnery their habitation. The etymology of Coventry is dubious; perhaps it comes from Lat. *conventus*. Cf. Covent Garden, built on the site of a garden formerly belonging to the monks of Westminster.

calling the latter "*amatrix Matris Dei*," the lover of the Mother of God. These pious founders were frequent companions of the Confessor, and, together with the sainted king, beheld a vision of Christ whilst partaking of the Eucharist,¹ an occurrence the Coventry monks, who, like others of their kind, greatly rejoiced in the tale of vision or miracle, were wont to relate with much complaisance in after days. They told how Leofric² "was himself at a little other back place of the Chappell of our Lady in Westminster with the said King S. Edward," and at the hour of Mass the earl saw "between the hands of the Chaplaine . . . our Saviour in the Chair³ in the form of an Infant giving from his hand to our Lord the King, and to him His Blessing." Leofric "intended not that the king should see it,⁴ but that he should pray him to be certified of the living Saint." But the Confessor's eyes were as quick as those of his companion to behold the sacred sight, and he exclaimed, "*Sta, Leoffrice, sta, quod tu vides, video et Ego.*"

Some of the respect paid to the earl and the lady may in part be due to their patronage of the "regulars," or monastic orders, for the chroniclers were usually monks. The Godwins, who were Leofric's rivals in those

¹ Stanley, *Mem. Westminster*, 21.

² Burton MS. f. 109. See Appendix.

³ *i.e.* flesh. This is probably a translation from Norman French. The original was "Englised" by Humphrey Burton, town clerk, in the 17th century.

⁴ *i.e.* thought that he did not see it.

uneasy times, rarely have the historians' good word. For king Harold, son of Godwin, was a friend of the "seculars," and his college at Waltham was built for canons and not for monks. It was a great time for the founding of religious houses, and the Confessor, as befitted one of known sanctity of life, greatly encouraged these pious deeds. "It behoves every man," runs his charter to the monks of Coventry, "diligently to incline to almsgiving, whereby he may release himself from the bonds of sin. For our Lord in a sermon thus speaketh: 'Lay up for yourselves with alms-deeds a treasure-hoard in heaven, and a dwelling with angels.'¹ For which needful thing I make known to you all that I grant with full permission that the same gift which Leofric and Godgyuæ have given to Christ, and the brethren within the minster at Coventry, for their souls' help, in land and in water, in gold and in silver, in ornaments, and in all other things, as full and as forth as they themselves possessed it, and as they that same minster worthily have enriched therewith, so I firmly grant it. And furthermore, I grant to them also, for my soul, that they have besides full freedom, sac and soc,² toll, team,³ hamsocne,⁴ foresteall,⁵ blodewite,⁶ fihtwite,⁷ weardwite,⁸

¹ See Matt. vi. 20. This translation mainly follows Birch.

² Privilege of administering justice.

³ Obscure. Birch says privilege of vouching to warranty.

⁴ Power to punish for forcible entry.

⁵ Power to inflict punishment for forestalling.

⁶ Power to punish assault with bloodshed.

⁷ Power to punish assault.

⁸ Power to maintain watch.

and mundbryce.¹ Now I will henceforward that it ever be a dwelling of monks, and let them stand in God's peace, and S. Mary's and in mine, and according to S. Benedict's rule, under the abbot's authority. And I will not in any wise consent that any man take away or eject their gift and their alms, or that any man have there any charge upon any things, or at any season, except the abbot and his brethren for this minster's need. And whosoever shall increase this alms with any good the Lord shall increase unto him Heaven's bliss; and whosoever shall take them away, or deprive the minster of anything at any time, let him stand in God's anger, and His dear Mother's and mine. God keep you all."²

Thus the monastery was endowed by Leofric and Godiva with twenty-four lordships of land; and by the king with full rights of jurisdiction over the tenants dwelling in these various estates, privileges greatly valued by the monks. They laid the two generous founders, the husband in one porch, the wife in the other, of the minster in Coventry, when they came to die. As for this building, it was one of the glories of the age, and seemed too nar-

¹ Power to punish for breach of peace.

² Add. MS. Ch. 28,657. Birch, *Edward the Confessor's Charter to Coventry*. "A most elegant specimen of native palæography" (Birch). The editors of Dugdale's *Monasticon* (III. 190-1) cite three texts of charters given to Coventry—Leofric's, Edward the Confessor's, and the Conqueror's. All are in Latin. Kemble (*Codex Diplomaticus*, Nos. DCCCCXXXIX. DCCCCXVI.) has the first two, but never mentions this Anglo-Saxon specimen. In the *Monasticon* is mentioned a Bull of pope Alexander, dated 1043, freeing the monastery from diocesan interference, which I have mainly followed.

row, a chronicler tells us, to contain the abundance of treasure within its walls. Godiva paid the most famous goldsmiths of her day to visit the place, and make reliquaries and images of saints to beautify the church she loved; she also gave a rosary of gems to hang about the neck of an image of the Virgin, her chief patroness. The monks, too, gathered in a great store of relics, whereof the most famous was an arm of S. Augustine of Hippo, brought from Pavia by archbishop Ethelnoth, having been purchased for the sum of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.¹

Of this minster, however, but a few stones remain, and its successor the Gothic cathedral, was destroyed under Henry VIII. The legend of its foundress² has been more enduring. Vulgarised and disguised by later amplifications,³ the narrative, in its earliest form, has a grandeur which still impresses the imagination. The story was a favourite one with Landor from his boyhood, though his *Imaginary Conversation*, and Drayton's brief lines are less popularly known than the poem of Tennyson. Discussions as to the authenticity of the narrative are

¹ *Dict. Nat. Biography*, s.v. Ethelnoth.

² Godiva is also commemorated as a benefactress of religious houses at Leominster, Herefordshire, S. Werburgh, Chester, Stow, Lincolnshire, Wenlock, Shropshire, Worcester, and Evesham.

³ The legend of "Peeping Tom" does not appear until the eighteenth century, though a ballad written about 1650 (Evans' *Old Ballads*, II. 34) mentions that Godiva ordered all persons to keep within doors and shut their windows. Rapin was the first to mention it, *Hist. Eng.* (1732), I. 135. The name "Peeping Tom" occurs in the city accounts, June 11, 1773, when a new wig was obtained for the effigy. See *Dict. Nat. Biography*, s.v. Godiva.

idle; it is possible, according to Godiva's latest biographer,¹ that the legend may contain a kernel of truth. There is no contemporary evidence to guide us, for Roger of Wendover, whose account of the famous ride is probably the earliest we possess, died in 1237,² some hundred and fifty years after the noble lady herself. The chroniclers differ as to the motive which prompted the undertaking, some asserting that the Coventry folk were to be freed thereby from a grievous tax, or incident of villeinage; others again³ connecting it with the local immunity from the payment of toll—except for horses, a special feature of the market of Coventry.⁴ It is in the latter connection that the story has impressed itself on the local mind.

"I Luveriche for love of thee
Doe make Coventre Tol-free,"

was written under a window placed in Trinity Church in Richard II.'s time in commemoration of the deed.⁵

"This cite shulde be free, and now is bonde,
Dame goode Eve made hit free,"

wrote a discontented burgher poet of the fifteenth cen-

¹ The writer of the article in the *Dict. Nat. Biography*.

² On events which occur before 1151 (or 1188) the chronicler is dependent on some earlier unknown writer (*Dict. Nat. Biography*).

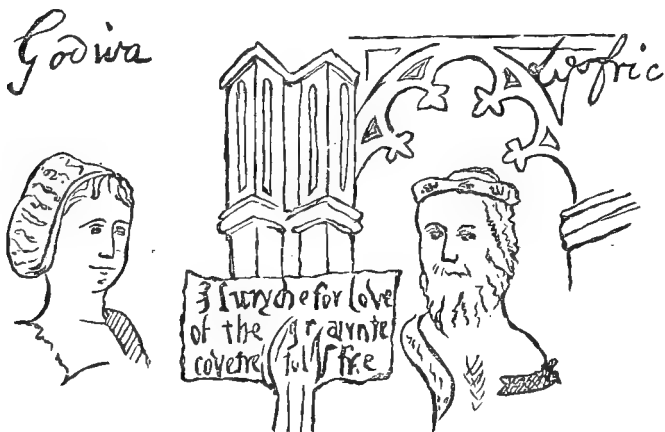
³ They follow Higden, author of the *Polychronicon*, who was the first to mention the ride in this connection. As a monk of S. Werburgh's, Chester, a city which held frequent intercourse with Coventry, he may have had opportunities of hearing the tale from local sources.

⁴ In Coventry market the burgesses were free from toll, except for horses, in the time of Edward I. (*Dugdale, Warw. I.* 162).

⁵ *Ib.* I. 135.

ture, when a custom for wool had been laid on the people of the town.¹

Roger of Wendover tells us how the countess besought her husband continually, with many prayers to free the people from the tax; and though he refused and forbade her to approach him with this petition, "led by her womanly pertinacity," she repeated the request, until he



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THE WINDOW IN TRINITY CHURCH.

(From a reproduction of a Drawing by Stukely in Burgess's *Historic Warwickshire*.)

gave answer: "Ride naked through the length of the market, when the people are gathered together, and when thou returnest, thy petition shall be fulfilled." . . . Then the countess, beloved of God, loosened her hair thus veiling her body, and then, mounting her horse and attended by two knights, she rode through the market

¹ Sharp, *Antiquities of Coventry* (ed. Fretton, 1870), 236.

seen of none, her most white legs nevertheless appearing; and having completed her journey, returned to her husband rejoicing, and obtained from him what she had asked," for he forthwith gave the townsfolk a charter, emancipating them from the aforesaid service.¹

Naturally, the charter is not forthcoming, and historians have shrugged their shoulders at the mention of the story this many a day. The chroniclers took it very seriously, and so did the townspeople of the Middle Ages. It was not, however, until the time of Charles II. that the Godiva procession became a feature of Coventry fair. In 1678, we are told, "Lady Godiva rode before the mayor to proclaim the fair," and the custom thus inaugurated obtains to this day.²

The Leofric of history was a man of wide fame under the Confessor. "He was very wise, 'fore God, and also 'fore the world," the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says, "which profited all this nation."³ During this long reign he held a middle position between the Confessor's foreign favourites on the one hand, and the national party, headed by Godwin, earl of Wessex, on the other. At one time the respective families of these two great earls had for their estates or lordships, practically the whole of England. Many members of Leofric's family were famous in their day. Ælfgar, his son, earl of East Anglia, an outlaw,

¹ Rog. Wendover, *Flores Historiarum*, I. 497.

² Poole, *Coventry*, 57-66.

³ Thorpe, *Anglo-Saxon Chron.* II. 159. For Leofric's political position, death, and family, see Freeman, *Norm. Conq.* II. 49, 414, 631.

hoping, with the aid of the Welsh, to recover his lost position, invaded England, sacked Hereford and burnt the minster—a piece of sacrilege which did not deter the monks of Coventry from burying him in their cathedral when his stormy life was over. Godiva, it is thought, survived her husband many years. She saw her granddaughter, Aldgyth, first wife, then widow of Gruffydd, prince of Wales; then wife and widow of Harold, king of England; and outliving Hastings, the Conquest, and the changes William wrought, the aged foundress of Coventry beheld the rebellion and ruin of her grandsons, the earls Edwin and Morkere. After her death, stories of her holy life and alms-deeds were doubtless soon rife among the oppressed Saxons. It is noteworthy that Matilda, queen of Henry I., a sovereign of the old Saxon blood royal, and a most pious princess to boot, was called Godiva, no doubt in scorn of her birth, by the Norman courtiers.¹ The end of Harold's queen, Aldgyth—or, as the compilers of Domesday call her, ignoring her second marriage, “Algid uxor Grifin”—is obscure. Her lands in Warwickshire were naturally confiscated by the Normans, and the monks of Coventry bought them from one Osbern before the date of the taking of the great Survey.²

¹ Hales, *Percy Folio*, III. 475.

² Reader, *Warw. Domesday*; Freeman, *Norm. Conq.* II. 630.

II

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY

THE Benedictine house was built in part upon the northern slope of a low hill, in part in the hollow through which the river Sherbourne flows. This was a situation well adapted for the building of a monastery; there was rich soil in the neighbourhood, good roads—both the Watling Street¹ and the Foss Way ran within a few miles from the spot and were connected by the Welsh Road²—and

¹ There seems to have been a time when the line of the Watling Street was deserted, and the main thoroughfare between London and the north-western parts, where passage was taken for Ireland, lay through Coventry. The city was called "a great thoroughfare town" in 1635 (Corp. MS. A. 35). See Appendix. In 1760 the mercers' company in Coventry contributed £15 towards a fund raised to oppose a Bill before Parliament for utilizing the Watling Street for traffic, on the ground that the measure would be hurtful to the city (Fretton, *Bygone Warwickshire*, 108).

² There was, Mr. Fretton tells me, a line of Romano-British forts and entrenchments extending from Aston-le-Wall in Northamptonshire, in a direct line through Southam, Wappenbury, Bubbenhall, Baginton, Corley, Fillongley, Whitacre and Kingsbury, to near Fazeley on the Watling Street. In many of these places there are important earthworks. There must have been a line of communication between these forts, though the line of actual road has in many cases been broken or diverted; it is however even now known as the Welsh Road and is still traceable for miles.

running water. The Sherbourne is but a small stream nowadays, but it was a more important watercourse in earlier times, and in the fifteenth century many precautions had to be taken "in eschewing peril of floods."¹ The monks could stock Swanswell Pool with fish, and plant their orchards or vineyards in or near the hollow in which the monastery lay. The slope of the ground both north and south formed a sheltered spot such as Benedictines frequently chose wherein to erect their dwellings. Over to the north and north-western parts stretched the forest of Arden. Some way to the east lay Dunsmore Heath, the scene, so the legend goes, of the slaughter of the "buffalo dun cow," one of Guy of Warwick's numerous marvellous deeds.² But in spite of the loneliness of the heath and forest, the near neighbourhood of the great Roman roads must have brought many travellers, bearing news of the great world, to Coventry, and the monks' market was frequented by dwellers of the country round, while towns of a certain importance lay comparatively close at hand. Lichfield, where the bishop had his seat, lay some twenty-four miles distant. Leicester on the Foss Way, a flourishing town in those days, while Coventry was but a village of no account, was a little nearer. But Warwick, founded by Ethelfled, the "Lady

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 4a.

² Guy of Warwick also freed Coventry from a fabulous monster. In the last century there was still shown there "a great shield, bone of a bore (*sic*) which" he "slew in Hunting, when he (*i.e.*) the boar) had turned with his Snout a great Put or Pond which is now called Swanswell, but Swineswell in times past." Gough, *Collect. Warw.* (Bodleian Library).

of the Mercians" and sister of Alfred the Great, was in yet closer neighbourhood. Alcester on the Ridgeway, and Evesham with its monastery, were natural centres for traffic. Between the monks of Coventry and those of the latter place there was much intercourse in early days. Manni, the goldsmith, afterwards abbot of Evesham, was employed to make reliquaries and images of saints to adorn the minster at Coventry.¹ And we are told that one Sperkulfus,² "*religiosus et valde venerabilis vitæ, monachus Coventrensis,*" who resorted to Evesham at festivals and passed the night in psalmody and prayer, saw a vision of the Virgin there as he watched and prayed. In later days we hear of the friendship which existed between the monks of Derley in Derbyshire and those of Coventry, and of the exchange of commodities between them, presents of soap and needles coming from the latter, and saddles and riding furniture from the former place, "by way of mutual courtesies," as Dugdale says. There was also frequent intercourse between Coventry folk and the great Cistercian houses of Combe,³ Stoneley and Merevale. Now and then we also find mention of other religious houses near—the priory of Maxtoke, and the house of Augustinians at Kenilworth.

The order of S. Benedict, to which the Coventry monks belonged, was established in the sixth century, and quickly found favour in the sight of those wishing

¹ *Chron. Evesham*, 86.

² *Ib.* 51.

³ The abbot of Combe held houses in Coventry in the fifteenth century.

to withdraw from the world and embrace a religious life. Throughout Christendom monasteries sprang up, and as time went on and the strict discipline of the order relaxed, notable reformers arose. Some of these founded in their turn new orders and insisted on the practice of greater austerities than were usual among the Benedictines of that date. Most of the important monastic houses in England were of the unreformed type. We may call to mind Westminster, Christ Church, Canterbury, Evesham, and Bury S. Edmund's. The reformed bodies, however, such as the Clugniacs, Carthusians, and Cistercians, numbered their adherents in England. The Carthusians, perhaps the most ascetic of the monastic orders, could boast of but nine houses in this country, their austere and solitary way of life according little with the tastes of Englishmen. One of these, of which there are considerable remains, was built at Coventry. In London, at the Charterhouse, there is one cell left in fair preservation, and the Certosa, near Florence, is an example of a Carthusian monastery still in working order, though the number of its inhabitants are but few. The Cistercians¹ had three houses in the shire of Warwick, a fact which bespeaks their popularity. Experts in agriculture and gardening, and known in the fourteenth century in distant Florence as among the chief wool exporters in England,² they

¹ For particulars concerning this subject see Miss Cooke's *Cistercians in England*, in *Eng. Hist. Rev.* VIII. 625 (October, 1893).

² Cunningham, *English Industry and Commerce* (1896), I. 624

preferred to dwell in solitary places, and, unlike the Benedictine house at Coventry, the abbeys of Combe and Merevale never became the centre of a flourishing town. The secular orders, the canons of a cathedral, or the priests of a collegiate church concern us little. These were not bound by monastic vows or subject to monastic discipline. They were cordially hated by the regular orders or bodies of monks, and they reciprocated this hatred. We shall see many instances of this mutual enmity in the story of the continual disputes between the brethren at Coventry and the Lichfield canons during the twelfth century.

The main feature of a monk's life was its well-ordered monotony, so congenial to many minds; but as a class monks were not specially addicted to idleness or solitude. Neither were they in most cases entirely devoted to spiritual things, for although the salvation of the individual soul was the primal object of monasticism, members of the religious orders were adepts at secular business, and did not suffer their houses to decay from neglect of the affairs of this world.¹ There was always plenty of work for any monk possessing a clear head and a faculty for administration. The various officers of the convent, *obedientarii* as they were

sqq. There is here a list of the English Cistercian houses which supplied the Florentines with wool.

¹ The extent of monastic agricultural enterprise was very great. At the abbey of Meaux, near Beverley, there were 2,638 sheep, 515 oxen, and 98 horses (Jusserand, *Wayfaring Life*, 83).

called, had each his appointed task. Every one was allowed a certain proportion of the convent revenue to devote to the expenses connected with his office.¹ In return he presented his accounts at the annual audit, keeping them carefully and exactly, recording everything, down to the receipt of a pot of honey, "or the price of the parchment on which the various items were written." In the case of Coventry the rents of certain tenements in S. Nicholas Street, Bailey Lane, Well Street ("super corneram Vici Fontis"), were assigned to the cellarer;² those coming from land in Keresley to the treasurer; while the prior's chamberlain disposed of money accruing from houses in Spon and Bishop Streets, the same forms being observed with regard to the pitancier and sacristan. The rents paid in kind—butter, honey, eggs, etc.—were probably entered among the kitcheners' receipts; while the accounts, compiled from daily entries, must have given many clerks almost unceasing labour.

We have, unfortunately, no local chronicles,³ such as those kept within the cloisters of S. Alban's, giving us

¹ For a popular account of a monastery v. Jessopp, *Coming of the Friars*, 113-165. See for further particulars Clarke's *Observances of Barnwell Priory*. On the inconvenience of this method of invariably allotting a certain revenue to the convent officials, and to the accumulation of debts consequent thereon, see Kitchin's *Obedientiaries' Rolls of Winchester*.

² *Leet Book*, f. 238.

³ The chronicler, whose name—Walter of Coventry—seems to attest some local connection, was not a monk of this house. Stubbs, *Pref. to Walter of Coventry (Rolls)*, I. xxii.-xxiii.

particulars concerning the lives of the Coventry monks. But no doubt, in essentials, the management of various houses differed little. At Evesham, for example, the prior was bound to furnish the parchment required for the scriptorium, and all other writing materials except ink, out of the sum allotted to him. The manciple provided the wine, mead, oil and lamps, and kept up the stock of earthenware, jugs, basins, and other vessels required for the convent use. The precentor—as befitted one whose office was to train the choir—was bound to keep the organ in repair, and over and above to find all the ink and colour required for illumination, together with all materials for binding books. While to the chamberlain a certain revenue was assigned to provide for the clothing of the monks.¹ All these matters gave the convent officers daily occupation, and must have absorbed much thought and interest.

Yet those who took little or no part in the administration of the convent were now and then, perhaps, oppressed by the sameness of their life. For everything there was a time and season in a well-ordered monastery. On certain appointed days, for instance, the brethren were let blood or had their hair cut. The former process came to be looked on, by many, as affording a slight diversion, for, after the bleeding, the brethren took *deportum*, or went into the infirmary, where a more liberal diet was allowed them until they recovered strength.

¹ Jessopp, 138.

Complete submission was required from the brethren at large by the higher officers of the convent. This was, of course, necessary for the organization of the establishment, and yet here great suffering came in. Small-minded folk, "drest in a little brief authority," love to make their wills felt, and many an abbot or prior, with a will to tyrannise, could make the monks' lives a burden. It was not an easy thing to acquire the monastic habit of obedience. We are told that when Lanfranc was once reading to his fellow-monks, an ignorant prior corrected him for a supposed false quantity in his Latin. The great scholar gave up the pronunciation, and said what he had been wrongly told to say, "thinking that he owed obedience to Christ rather than to Donatus the grammarian . . . for to make a short syllable long, or a long one short, he knew to be no deadly sin; but not to obey one set over him in God's behalf was no light transgression."¹ Any old inhabitant of a mediæval monastery could have furnished us with countless instances of the like dictatorial behaviour, but few, perhaps, of so gracious and generous an act of submission.

For those of fervent spirit the daily religious exercises were the salt of life, but for others — possibly the greater number—they were merely part of the daily routine, and repetition had increased monotony. Many hours of the day were passed in these regularly recurring services of the Church. At midnight the brethren rose and went to Matins and Lauds. Prime was celebrated

¹ Church, *Anselm*, 87-8.

at six, Tierce at nine, Sext at twelve, Nones at two or three, Vespers at four, and Complin at seven. After Tierce the duties of the day began;¹ and the different obedientiaries went each to fulfil his appointed task. The rest sat in the cloisters, taught the children in the school, or copied manuscripts. There were frequent consultations in the chapter-house, and on Sundays, before Prime or Tierce, the abbot sat in the cloisters to hear the monks' confessions, and appointed to each the penance due for his fault. Now and then the coming of an important stranger—a royal guest, perhaps, such as William the Conqueror, who passed, it is supposed, through Coventry on his way from Warwick to Nottingham in 1068²—would furnish the brethren with a topic for many weeks' conversation. The entertainment of numerous guests at a monastery near a high road must have been a drain on the convent resources, for monastic fare was proverbially good, and kings, bishops, and nobles naturally required to be lodged and fed with the best. There were, indeed, some delicate palates which the monks found it hard to please. When Richard de Marisco, who was very nearly made bishop of Coventry, "taking compassion on the weakness of the convent's drink," gave the monks of S. Alban's the tithes of Eglingham in Northumberland, the gift must have been understood in the light of a hint to make the convent beer of better quality.³ Monks are, however,

¹ Fosbrooke, *Brit. Monachism*, 28-9.

² Freeman, *Norm. Conq.* IV. 196.

³ Jessopp, 157.

usually credited with loving comfort and good cheer, a peculiarity not by any means confined to the monastic orders.

Sometimes the brethren were suffered to have a glimpse of the great world without the convent with their own eyes. The prior, who was of the company of mitred abbots, was frequently forced to travel to whatever place the king might appoint for the meeting of the parliament. May-be, like other great ecclesiastics, such as the bishop of Ely, the memory of whose residence the name Ely Place still preserves for us, he had a town house in the city or suburbs of London. The rank and file of the convent had now and then opportunities of seeing life in travel. They might undertake a pilgrimage; or, when a dispute was on hand, and appeal had been made to the Holy Father, one of the brethren would journey Rome-wards, with well-lined pockets, to look after the convent's interest at the papal court. These lawsuits were not infrequent, as may be shown by the career of Geoffrey, prior of Coventry during the reign of Henry III.¹ In 1224 the monks tried to raise him to the episcopal throne, but the election was quashed by the archbishop, and the usual appeal to Rome only brought another—a papal—candidate to fill the vacant seat. This occurrence did not in all probability predispose the minds of the actual and would-be bishop to mutual goodwill. In 1232 the prior was suspended for resisting the episcopal visitation, and, together with the

¹ Luard, *Annales Monastici*, III. 90; I. 89-90.

abbot of Westminster, set out hot-foot to Rome, to lay his grievances before the pope. A year or two later we find him involved in a quarrel with the abbot of S. Augustine's, Bristol. What heart-burnings these obscure disputes must have occasioned, what journeyings to and fro, and, above all, what wealth was lost to the monastery to satisfy the Roman greed of gold!

It is the record of these disputes that forms the bulk of the history of the monastic houses of England, and the priory of Coventry is no exception to the general rule. Placed in a somewhat dependent position—for during the episcopate of Robert de Livesey (1085-1117) the bishop's seat had been transferred from Chester to this place—the monks were, earlier or later, bound to realize the dangers of episcopal tyranny and encroachment. Livesey, the first bishop in whom the abbacy was vested—the superior of the convent being henceforward called a prior—soon made the monks feel his heavy yoke. Bitter were the complaints they made concerning his conduct. On the death of the last abbot in 1095, he obtained leave to farm the convent revenue, and, using the permission to serve his own ends, wrought much harm to the estates of the monastery, pulling down houses thereon, and carrying off the materials to his own manors, seizing horses and other monastic property. But the crying instance of his greed, one which the chroniclers have carefully and tremblingly noted, was his plunder of the magnificent minster. He scraped off the silver coating of a beam—worth 500 marks—most likely

from a shrine in that goodly treasure-house!¹ It was little wonder that the indignant monks turned to Rome for aid against this devourer of their substance.²

Nor was this the only bishop who, from his fair palace in St. Michael's churchyard, caused his neighbours of the priory to tremble for the safety of their possessions. Hugh of Nunant, a monk-hater, who vowed, it is said, that "if he had his own way he would strip every cowed head in England," was nominated to the see in 1184. He is variously described as a man of piety and eloquence or as one desperately wicked.³ Politically he was a follower of prince John, who, during his brother king Richard's imprisonment in Germany, was endeavouring to strengthen his own position by forming a rebel party in the Midlands. Nunant obtained license to incorporate the prior's barony with his own episcopal one, and by his continual exactions and oppressions so enraged the monks that they fell on him during a synod in the cathedral church, and broke his head with a crucifix. The bishop, indignant in his turn, applied to Longchamp, the absent king's representative, for license to punish the outrage. And he was allowed to expel the brethren, "contaminated," so he said, "with secular pollution," from the monastery, and appoint secular canons, who probably came from Lichfield, in their stead. Appeal was made to Rome, but the monks were now too impoverished to obtain a favourable hearing of

¹ Dugdale, *Monasticon* (1846), III. 178.

² Beresford, *Diocesan Hist. Lichfield*, 51.

³ *Ib.* 78.

their suit at the papal court. So they remained in exile for several years.

But the adversary's triumph was, after all, short-lived. In 1194 king Richard, ransomed from prison, returned to England, and the schemes of prince John and bishop Nunant fell to the ground. The latter was deposed from his bishopric, and the monks he had oppressed took heart of grace, and bethought them how they might return to their old home. The story goes how one of their number put an end to the brethren's exile by his intercession with the pope. Although often forced to beg his bread, brother Thomas tarried long at Rome, and offered to each fresh occupant of S. Peter's chair the petition of the monks of Coventry. On one occasion his Holiness in an angry mood bade the monk withdraw, telling him that other petitions to the same purpose had been exhibited to Clement and Celestine, his predecessors, but rejected, and therefore his expectations were vain. Unto which the monk, with bitter tears, replied: "Holy Father, my petition is just and altogether honest, and therefore my expectations are not vain; for I expect your death, as I have done your predecessors, for there shall one succeed you who will hear my petition to purpose." Then said the pope to the cardinals: "Hear ye not what this devil hath spoken?" And immediately turned to him and said: "Brother, by S. Peter, thou shalt not expect my death; thy petition is granted."¹ So

¹ Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 161. Rather an improbable story. More likely after Nunant's fall the monks found some one to plead their cause with the king.

the monks returned joyfully to their old home; but Hugh of Nunant, so the chroniclers tell us, died in remorse and torment of mind, deploring the injuries he had done to the Coventry brethren "with abundant sighs and tears," and praying that he might die in a frock of the order he had in life despised.

But grasping bishops were not the only enemies known to the monks. There was a long-standing feud between the brethren of Coventry and the canons of Lichfield, dating from the time when Stephen gave them, together with the canons of Chester, permission to elect the bishop of the diocese.¹ The monks frequently defeated their object by nominating a candidate of their order, usually the prior, whom the canons would in nowise be induced to accept. Appeals to Rome would follow; and the pope, seizing the opportunity, would set aside previous nominations, and impose his own candidate upon the contending parties.

At the first election we hear of, the Coventry brethren were able to secure the bishopric for one of their order, the prior of Canterbury, in spite of the canons' protests and appeal to Rome. But when, after his enthronement at Coventry, bishop Durdent came to Lichfield, the canons barred the gates of their fortified close against him, and, in the face of the episcopal excommunication, denied him entrance. They also refused to enthrone Gerard la Pucelle, elected by the sole voice of the monks in 1183. "*Unica est sponsa mea, nec habeo duo*

¹ Beresford, 69.

cubacula,"¹ said the bishop in his discouragement. And this learned and righteous prelate died four months later, not without suspicion of poison. Nunant was appointed by the Crown; but on his death in 1199 the passions of the rivals, strengthened by political antagonism—for the canons were partizans of John while the monks clave to king Richard—again broke loose. On the nomination of Richard's candidate, one of the monks led off the *Te Deum*, as a signal that the proceedings were over, though the canons had taken no part in the election. "Who made thee cantor here?" cried the archdeacon of Stafford, a member of John's party, in great wrath, for the cantor on these occasions conducted the singing. "I am cantor here, and not thou," was the reply, and as king Richard's party was then predominant the monks had their will.²

At the next election³ the brethren were brought face to face with king Richard's successor, and John found it a hard thing to subdue the Coventry monks, though he had at his back the entire company of the canons of Lichfield. In 1210, when England was under an Interdict, the king sent to them the abbots of Oseney and Waltham, proposing the archdeacon of Stafford as a candidate for the vacant see of Coventry. But the monks would have none of him. They elected their prior, Joybert of Wenlock, and purposed to send the nomination

¹ Which may be paraphrased: "I have but one diocese, and must I have but one cathedral?" (Beresford, 76).

² Cott. MS. quoted Dugdale, *Monasticon*, VI. iii. 1242.

³ *Ib.* 1242-3.

oversea to the incoming archbishop, Stephen Langton. At Tewkesbury John proposed the abbot of Bindon. The monks refused utterly. "None whom I love wilt thou choose," cried the angry king. Then to the justiciar said the prior, afraid: "If it suits the lord king well, I will elect his chancellor." The chancellor was Walter de Grey, who was subsequently raised to the see of York. This proposal found no favour then, and the king appointed another meeting with the monks at Nottingham. On their return home they held a consultation in the chapter-house, and determined that they would elect neither of the king's candidates, Richard de Marisco and the abbot of Bindon. At Nottingham Castle Joybert and six monks besought the king that he would allow them to elect freely and canonically the prior or some other fitting man. Meanwhile all manner of threats and blandishments were used to make them give their voice for one of the royal nominees, but they held firm. Next morning, however, when the prior and two monks tarried long in the king's chamber, the four remaining brethren, fearing that their superior would at last give way, determined to go home and reserve their vote; but Fulk de Cantilupe shut the castle gate in their faces, vowing "by the tongue of God" that they should not leave ere they had made a bishop to the king's liking, "and other things he uttered," the record continues, "not meet to be said."

At last prior Joybert began to waver, for the king promised him great rewards and honours if he would do his will, and urged him, saying: "Speak, prior,

“speak!” Then Joybert fell on his knees. “By the soul of thy father the king,” he said, “and of thy brother the king, and by the honour of thy life, who art king, if it be not possible for us to have any other than one of these two, give us the abbot of Bindon.” “Never while I live shall this be,” cried one of the monks, named Thomas, “and never shall he be my bishop.” A bystander reproved him for this outburst towards his superior. “In the cloister I am but a monk,” the fearless brother answered, “but here, at the election of the bishop, I am the prior’s fellow.” Then John, looking about him in great anger, left the room, and many nobles gathered about the monks, and urged them to fulfil the king’s will. “Verily ye have much to fear,” they said, “if ye bring down his wrath upon your heads.”

The unhappy monks were again summoned into the king’s presence. “Lord prior,” the tyrant began, “I have always loved thee, and thou wilt not do my will. What sayest thou to my chancellor, whose name thou didst propose to me at Tewkesbury?” The prior signified that he willingly accepted this candidate, and the king gave orders that the canons should be summoned to ratify the election. At this the smouldering jealousy between monks and canons burst into flame. “By S. Milburg,” cried the prior, “they shall not come; never shall they be present at our election!” But John swore “by the tooth of God” that they should come in. “I would rather die,” Joybert answered, “than be the cause of the destruction of my order.” The nobles, who were present, gathered round the monks, and, falling

upon their necks, entreated them to submit. Then the prior, vanquished, said : "Because nothing else is pleasing to you, and it is not possible to do other, do your will." A *Te Deum* was then sung by the company of monks and canons, although the former murmured greatly at the constraint laid upon them.

The case was afterwards laid before the papal legate, and the election of Walter de Grey annulled. The long dispute between monk and canon came to a close in 1227, when it was ordained that the election should take place alternately at Coventry and Lichfield, the prior having first voice and the dean second.¹ So the quarrel gradually died away, and, well tutored by pope and king, the electors ever afterwards peacefully met to choose the particular candidate designated by those in authority. A typical election occurred on "the Monday after the Conversion of St. Paul" in the year 1256.² The monks and canons met on that day in the chapter-house at Coventry, and, after solemn masses had been said, they proceeded to elect a bishop. Two *scrutatores* were appointed by each side to examine the votes, and when they came to be overlooked it was found that the suffrages were divided amongst four candidates. The prior and thirty monks, the precentor, treasurer, chancellor, and fifteen canons of Lichfield, and the two Lichfield *scrutatores*, voted for Roger de Meulong, chaplain of the pope and "nephew of the lord king"; the dean and six canons for Master Roger, chancellor of Salisbury; two canons for the treasurer of Lichfield, and

¹ Luard, *Annales Monastici*, III. 104. ² *Ib.* I. 379-80.

one for the archdeacon of Salop. No doubt in his two-fold capacity of dependent of king and pope Master Roger de Meulong was thought to be the candidate most acceptable to the ruling powers, and, on hearing the preponderance of voting in his favour, his rivals withdrew their candidature. The prior therefore duly proclaimed "the election of the said Roger," and announced it to the people.

Thus the monks of Coventry and their rivals made a lasting peace. When trouble again arose, the convent of S. Mary found that the enemy had sprung up under the very shadow of the monastery itself, and that the men of Coventry were even more implacable foes than the canons of Lichfield had been in times past. These quarrels between ecclesiastical bodies and their burgher tenants were of common occurrence in mediæval life. The strong corporate feeling which flourished amongst the monks, the zeal they bore for their order in general and their house in particular, which involved them in endless quarrels, caused them to play a notable part in municipal history. As a body they were opposed to the growth of free institutions among the townsfolk. They never rightly understood their tenants' desire for increase of municipal liberty, and feared by giving way to their demands to forego the rights of the Church, and bring their souls in peril thereby.¹

¹ For the disputes between ecclesiastics and their tenants see Mrs. Green, *Town Life*, I. 333-383; Thompson, *Municipal History*, *passim*. This feature is not confined to England. For the disputes between the men of Rouen and the chapter see Giry, *Établissements de Rouen*, 24.

III

THE CHESTER LORDSHIP

THE place where the monks settled was probably little better than a village. We may picture it as a couple of straggling streets intersecting one another, with small wooden houses on either side of the highway, which was comparatively empty of people except on market days when country folk would come in to sell their wares in the "Cheaping" at the monastery gates. Domesday records that there were only sixty-nine heads of families living on Godiva's estate at Coventry in 1086,¹ though Leicester and Warwick were fair-sized towns, as towns were accounted then.² Of the two parish churches, existing probably at the Con-

¹ Reader, *Domesday for Warwickshire*, 9: "The countess held Coventry. There are 5 hides. The arable employs 20 ploughs, 3 are in the demesne, and 7 bondmen. There are 50 villeins, and 12 bordars, with 20 ploughs. A mill pays 3s. A wood 2 miles long and the same broad. In king Edward's time and afterwards it was worth 12 pounds, now 11 pounds by weight. These lands of the countess Godiva Nicholas holds to ferm of the king."

² The most populous towns did not contain 10,000 inhabitants at that time. York, the greatest city mentioned in Domesday, had 1,418 houses, Norwich 738, Ipswich 530, Exeter 315, Canterbury 262, Warwick 225, Hertford 146, Southampton 84, Bath 64, and Northampton 60. (Thompson, *Hist. Leicester*, 24.)

quest,¹ S. Michael's served maybe for the tenants of the lay lord, and Trinity for those of the ecclesiastical estate. For from the beginnings of its history the town had been divided into two lordships, whereof the convent held the northern part or Prior's-half, not mentioned in Domesday, as the gift of their founder, earl Leofric; while the southern portion, the Earl's-half, which Leofric retained, became a part of the earl of Chester's vast inheritance.²

After the Conquest the convent retained their estate, receiving a gracious charter of confirmation from William, who, no doubt, was willing to link his name with that of his kinsman, the Confessor, as patron of this famed foundation.³ The Earl's-half, however, passed to other masters. Probably Godiva held it during her lifetime; but at her death the Conqueror took it, as the lady's grandchildren and direct heirs were, as rebels, naturally shut out from the inheritance. By this means the land at Coventry came to be looked on as the king's demesne, and the men had certain privileges belonging to this form of tenure.⁴ How it was that the estate passed into the hands of Ranulf Meschines,

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 1.

² Dugdale declares that the inheritance came to him through his mother Lucy, granddaughter of Leofric; but this is impossible. See Freeman, *Norm. Conq.* II. 631.

³ Add MS. Ch. 11,205. Leofric's gifts of lands, etc., with "sac and soc, toll and team," are therein confirmed to Leofwine, the abbot, and the brethren "sicut . . . Edwardus, cognatus meus, melius et plenius eisdem concessit."

⁴ Madox, *Firma Burgi*, 14.

earl of Chester, we can only conjecture. He had probably deserved well at the king's hand and had his reward. Though not, it is true, so disturbing an element in the burghers' lives as his continental brethren, an English feudal lord had much power for good or evil over his dependents. His castle—with its fortifications, often breaking into the line of the city wall, as Rougemont did at Exeter, or the Tower, built by the Conqueror to overawe the men of London—was a perpetual menace to the citizens. His officers or deputies could annoy and terrify the tenants in various ways. Thus one Simon le Maudit, who held in farm the bailiwick of Leicester, went on to collect gavel-pennies, which he said were due to the lord from the townsfolk, long after these payments had been remitted by charter. But this document having been destroyed by fire, the burghers had no evidence wherewith to support their claim, and Simon "the Accursed" had his will.¹ Instances of feudal oppression seem, however, to have been comparatively rare, though warlike lords by involving their tenants in their quarrels frequently brought trouble upon them.

Earl Ranulf came of a strong race. The founder of the family—whom the Welsh called Hugh "the Fat" by reason of his great girth, but the Normans "the Wolf" by reason of his fierceness—held manors of the Conqueror in twenty shires of England. Lord of the county palatine of Chester, the special privileges granted to him for the purpose of strengthening his hand against

¹ Thompson, *Leicester* (pocket ed.), 46-7.

the Welsh made him almost independent of royal authority.¹ Meschines himself is an obscure figure, but the fame of his successor, Ranulf Gernons,² whose doings were accounted terrible even in Stephen's time, when every man's hand was against his fellow, spread far and wide. Men likened him to Herod and Nero, saying he united the evil qualities—cruelty and truculence—of both these ancient potentates. At one time Gernons held the third part of England under his sway; but, powerful as he was, he brought little save calamity on his dependents. In his day Coventry became the battleground of the earl and Marmion of Tamworth, king Stephen's ally. That was an evil time for the monks, as Marmion seized and fortified the priory, and for the townsfolk, as they were between Marmion and Ranulf, the hammer and the anvil. The Tamworth lord died early in the struggle, for, falling into one of the trenches he had made to enclose the monastery, he was killed by a common soldier. No doubt the monks reminded one another that their sacrilegious oppressor, who so justly came to this evil end, was of an impious stock. Did not his ancestor expel the nuns of Polesworth from their dwelling, until, warned in a vision by S. Edith, their foundress, and sorely smitten by the staff of the saint, he repented and caused the sisterhood to return?³

¹ Ormerod, *Cheshire*, I. 10.

² For an account of Gernons, see Round in *Eng. Hist. Rev.* X. 87-91.

³ Timmins, *Warwickshire*, 21. The incident is commemorated in a window in Tamworth church.

Ranulf lived on to find a reverse of fortune at Coventry. Some years after the fight with Marmion, the earl finding the king's forces were possessed of the castle there, laid siege to the stronghold, but Stephen appearing, Ranulf's army was put to flight, and he himself escaped not without some wounds. It was a fitting end to this lawless life that he should die by poison and excommunicate; and his widow gave to Walter, bishop of Coventry, under whose curse her husband lay, the hamlet of Stivichall, so that his soul might have peace.¹

There was trouble also in the days of earl Hugh, Ranulf's successor. He joined in the great feudal rising of 1173, when all England was a scene of strange confusion, and only the energy and promptitude of Henry II. and a few faithful followers saved the king's throne. Henry's sons were arrayed against him, supported by the arch-enemy, the king of France, the Scotch, the Flemings, and many nobles both in England and Normandy, whose power and lawless ways the king had sought continually to restrain. Such were the earls Ferrars, Bigod of Norfolk, Robert of Leicester, and Hugh. The Church, since the death of Becket,

¹ Ormerod, *Cheshire*, I. 20-6; Hales, *Percy Folio*, III. 260-4; Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 137. Ormerod has a curious compact wherein Ranulf and Robert le Bossu, earl of Leicester, swore mutual fidelity, saving their fealty to their lord the king. If one were required by the king to follow him in an expedition against the other, he (the earl) agreed to bring only twenty followers, and to restore to the other party in the compact any plunder taken by his men.

had been alienated from the king. And Hugh, bishop of Durham, who held the northern counties as it were in the hollow of his hand, waited and temporized in order to link his fortune to the winning side. Only the larger towns, such as Norwich, and all those folk who had learned the value of order and good government, were staunch in their support of Henry. But in the Midlands where the barons' estates were largest and the feudal spirit most potent, discontent was at its height. The men of Coventry lent the earl of Chester aid in this rebellion, as the men of Leicester did to their lord, Robert Blanchmains, for those tenants who held land by military service were bound to follow their feudal superior to battle. But one by one the king's enemies were defeated. Earl Hugh was taken prisoner at the siege of Dol in Brittany quite early in the struggle and suffered a short imprisonment in the castle of Falaise.¹ And although he was afterwards restored to his liberty and possessions, Henry appears to have always looked upon him with some mistrust. Swift destruction—siege and fire—came upon Leicester for the share the townsfolk had taken in this rebellion, and the inhabitants for a time forsook the place.² Coventry, as a place of less note, suffered less; but what liberties the townsmen possessed were confiscated, not to be redeemed until after Hugh's death eight years later by a payment of twenty marks. The men of

¹ Ormerod, I. 26.

² Thompson, *Municipal History*, 45.

Norwich had also cause to regret the part they took in the celebrated rising, but it was Bigod who dealt them their punishment, burning the city out of revenge because his men had declared for the king's party.¹

The men of Coventry had, it is true, one reason to dwell with gratitude on the memory of earl Hugh. Dugdale tells us that among this lord's following was a leper. And it may have been for the sake of this man that Hugh built the lazarus-house and chapel of S. Mary Magdelene at Spon in the fields on the western side of the city.² All traces of this chapel have now disappeared, but the name Chapel Fields still serves to commemorate the place.³ Leprosy, brought from the East by the Crusades, took terrible hold on the people of western Europe, and few towns of any note in those days were without their lazarus-houses or hospitals for these sorely afflicted folk. The chief of these leper hospitals was at Burton Lazars in Leicestershire, but the one that is best remembered nowadays is that of S. Giles once "in the Fields," now in the heart of London.

The most famous among the earls of Chester was Ranulf, surnamed Blondvil, who succeeded to the earldom on Hugh's death. This befell in 1181. Ranulf was the last of the old order, the race of the feudal barons of the Conquest, who, by reason of their vast estates and almost princely power, were a constant source of anxiety to the kings of England. Men sang songs

¹ Thompson, 121. ² Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 197.

³ So I am informed by Mr. Fretton.

of earl Ranulf,¹ either of his loyalty to his master John, or of his feats in warring with the Welsh at home or the heathen abroad, for he joined the Crusades, and was present in 1219 at the siege of Damietta. He was as much of a popular hero as Robin Hood during the fourteenth century. The Church knew him as the benefactor of the monastic house of Pulton, whence he removed the monks, its inhabitants, to Dieulacres in Staffordshire. And his pious deeds availed to save him after death, people said, in spite of many offences. For at the time of his dying, a solitary man at Wallingford saw a company of demons hurrying past, and learnt from one of them that they were hastening to the earl's deathbed to accuse him of his sins. Adjured to return within thirty days, the demon came back and told the hermit what had befallen. "We brought it about," he said, "that Ranulf for his ill deeds was adjudged to the pains of infernal fire ; but the mastiffs of Dieulacres, and many others with them, without stinting barked so that they filled our habitation with a loud clamour whilst he was with us ; wherefore our prince, disgusted, ordered to be expelled from our territories him who now proved so grievous an enemy to us."² In this manner was the earl's

¹ Langland, *Piers Ploughman*, Passus V. l. 402. Sloth (a personification of one of the Seven Deadly Sins) says :

"I can nought perfitly my paster-noster . . .
But I can rymes of Robyn hood, and Ranulf, erle of Chestre."

It is more likely this earl is meant than his grandfather Gernons.

² Hales, *Percy Folio*, I. 264-73.

soul delivered from the evil place. He died childless, and his vast lands were divided among his sisters and their issue. The Earl's-half of Coventry fell to the lot of Hugh of Albany, and then passed to his ^{sister} daughter Cicily, wife of Roger de Monthault or Montalt. This family continued to hold it until the days of Edward III.

IV

BEGINNINGS OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

BUT how did the men live who inhabited Coventry, who were neither warriors nor monks, but the rank and file of the townsfolk, the mere tillers of the ground and retailers of food and clothing, farmers, bakers, butchers, shoemakers, weavers and the like? These men owed fealty, according to the position of the land they held, either to the prior or the earl of Chester. It is with the earl's burghers that the main part of our story lies. It was they who won, after many checks and struggles, such liberties of trading and self-rule as helped to make their city rich and famous in after days. For wherever townspeople found that their lord, whether he were a noble or the king himself, had need of their money or support, they bargained with him for a charter, a duly written and attested document giving them the power to exercise certain rights such as the collecting of their own taxes, or the managing of their own courts, without the interference of his officials. Just as the barons of England gained Magna Charta from John in his need and weakness, or forced Edward I. to confirm the same ere they would give him money to prosecute his wars, so the townsfolk played out the same play in their own much

humbler theatre, and drove their bargain with this or that great owner of estates.

For towns on the royal demesne the question resolved itself into one of mere traffic. Was the town rich enough to induce the king to grant a charter to the inhabitants conferring on them the liberties of which they stood in need? If so, the money was paid, and the town started on its career of independence. Nobles, too, were often willing to forego their manorial privileges for the sake of a substantial sum of money. But with churchmen and religious corporations the case was different. They were unwilling, under any circumstances, to part with the rights of the Church, "for fear," as the Coventry monks said, "of blemishing their consciences." In growing and prosperous communities, where men suffered by the restrictions laid upon their trade or persons, the attitude of the religious community, which stood to them in place of feudal lord, gave rise to great bitterness of feeling among the tenants. Discontent was in many cases the precursor of riot and bloodshed, showing how fierce was the spirit of resistance among these men, and with what tenacity they clung to the idea of freedom.¹

The condition of the men of S. Alban's, or those of any town where the inhabitants were serfs, was often miserable, or at best precarious.² "No independent life of the community," says Mrs. Green, "could arise so long

¹ Thompson, *Municipal History*, 20 sqq.

² For a list of the manorial services required of villein tenants see Maitland, *Select Pleas in Manorial Courts* (Selden Soc. I.), 102-4.

as the inhabitants of a town acknowledged an absolute subjection to their feudal lord. . . . He might destroy their industry by suddenly calling out the inhabitants to follow him in a warlike expedition, or demanding services of forced labour, or laying on them grievous taxes. His officers could throw the artizan or merchant into his prison, or ruin them by fines, or force upon them methods of law hateful and dangerous to their conceptions of a common life. As he claimed supreme rights over the soil, it was impossible for the burgher to leave his property by will; and on the tenant's death officers visited his house and stables and granaries to seize the most valuable goods as the lord's relief. It was necessary to gain his consent before any member could be admitted into the fellowship of citizens; and without his permission no inhabitant might leave the borough to carry on his trade elsewhere. He could forbid the marriage of children arranged by the fathers, or refuse to allow a widow to take a new husband, and so make him master of her house and freeman of her town. He fixed the market laws and the market tolls. He forced the people to grind at his mill and bake at his oven." ¹ Such was the condition of the villein tenants, who had no guarantee that all services would not be exacted from them, and all restrictions imposed on them to the last rigour of the feudal law.

But from these most oppressive burdens the Coventry men were free. They had in ancient custom a guarantee

¹ Green, *Town Life*, I. 197-8.

that their lord could not urge such claims upon them, for they held of him "in free burgage"; that is to say, they were quit of all personal service, and merely paid a money rent for house and land. They were not compelled to leave their business to carry in the crops on the lord's demesne, or follow him for a great distance to war, or bake at his oven, a custom the men of Melton observed until the days of James I.¹ These, and the like exemptions, were probably owing to the fact that the Earl's-half was of "ancient demesne,"² that is to say, that before the coming of the earls of Chester, the burghers held directly of the king, and whatever rights this tenure implied could not be taken away, even though the king was no longer their immediate lord.³

Still, although they were not entirely at the mercy of their feudal superior, the men of Coventry had, as yet, no voice in the town government. They owed obedience to three powers—the earl of Chester, the king, and the prior of Coventry. For any fault or misdemeanour they were summoned to appear at the earl's castle, where the constable fixed their punishment, and the fine they paid passed into the earl's hand. The author of any grave or serious crime was answerable to the sheriff, the king's officer. While the prior, the lord of the soil in the Cross

¹ Green, I. 199. The Preston men bargained that they should not be required to follow their lord on a warlike expedition lasting more than one day (*Ib.*).

² Madox, *Firma Burgi*, 14.

³ Reading, though belonging to the local abbot, had been on royal demesne; Barnstaple was in a somewhat similar case, Green, I. 299, 253.

Cheaping, regulated all matters connected with the traffic of the market. And, in later times, when permission to hold a fair was granted to him, the prior established a "pypowders"¹ court, wherein all disputes concerning bargains between the "dusty feet," i.e. travellers who came to the fair, and others were discussed and settled. Naturally the proceeds of this court went to enrich the convent.²

The townsfolk were neither rich nor strong enough to free themselves from the sheriff's jurisdiction, or their trade from the prior's surveillance. But in the reign of Henry II. they struck a bargain with Ranulf Blondvil, earl of Chester, whereby they obtained certain rights and privileges, and some measure of self-government. In his charter the earl granted to his burgesses of Coventry the same customs as those enjoyed by the men of Lincoln, for it was usual for the inhabitants of smaller towns to ask that their constitution might be modelled on that of some freer and more important place.³ Lincoln,⁴ in common with most of the larger towns in England, borrowed certain customs from London, and

¹ Pypowders, from *pied poudreux*=dusty foot.

² For the cases discussed in the abbot of Ramsey's court during the S. Ives fair, see Maitland, *Select Pleas in Manorial Courts*, 180-160.

³ For Henry II.'s charter to Lincoln see Stubbs, *Select Charters*, 166. The grant of a merchant guild, which was one of the Lincoln men's privileges, was not demanded, it seems, by the men of Coventry.

⁴ For list of affiliated towns see Gross, *Gild Merchant*, I. 244-257.

Coventry, in its turn, was to serve as model to other towns later in acquiring freedom.¹

The earl's charter, a model of the exquisite penmanship of the twelfth century, runs thus :—

“Ranulf, earl of Chester, to all his barons, constables, bailiffs, servants, men and friends, French and English, present and future, greeting. Know ye, that I have given to my burghers of Coventry, and confirmed in this my charter,² all things which are written in the same. Namely, that the said burghers and their heirs may hold well, honourably, and undisturbed, and in free burgage of me and of my heirs, as they held in my father's time or my other predecessors', better, more firmly and freely. I grant them the free and good laws that the burgesses of Lincoln have better and more freely. I . . . forbid my constable to bring them into my castle to plead in any cause ; but they may freely have their portmote, in which all pleas pertaining unto me and unto them may be justly treated of. Moreover, they may choose for me one,

¹ Nottingham and Winchester received a grant of particular customs after the pattern of Coventry (Gross, I. 251). Bristol was taken as a model by Dublin and many Irish towns (Hunt, *Bristol*, 60).

² Corp. MS. B. 1. The date is unknown. Dugdale, however, assigns it to Blondvil, and I see no reason to differ. If Blondvil were the grantor then the date would lie between the years 1181, that of earl Hugh's death, and 1186, when it appears the charter was confirmed by Henry II. See note, p. 46. On what authority Mr. Cunningham (*Growth of Eng. Industry*, I. 615) says the charter was confirmed by Henry I, I do not know.

whom they will among themselves, who may be judge under me and over them; who, knowing the laws and customs, may keep these in my council reasonably in all things, every excuse put away, and may faithfully perform unto me that which is due. And if by chance any one fall into my amercement, then he shall be reasonably amerced by my bailiff and the faithful burghers of the court. And whatever merchants they draw thither for the bettering of the town, I command that they have peace, and that no one do them an injury or put them at mercy.¹ If, indeed, any stranger merchant do anything unfitting in the town, that shall be amended before the aforesaid justice in the portmote without a suit-at-law. These being witnesses . . . Robert Steward de Mohaut . . . and many others."

We see from the terms of this charter that the Coventry folk had already acquired a certain status as free burghers. Now their liberties were enlarged by a grant of self-jurisdiction. A further grant from Henry II., appended to the confirmation of this charter, limited the fine due from the burghers to the earl for any fault to 12*d.*;² "but if by testimony of his neighbours he cannot pay so much, by their advice it shall be settled as he is able to pay." We can call up a possible picture of the court of portmanmote, to which the charter refers. In some large open space, possibly S. Michael's churchyard, the townsfolk might be seen gathered together for the fortnightly meet-

¹ *i.e.* amerce, or fine, them.

² Corp. MS. B. 2. The charter is dated "apud Merlebergam" = Marlborough. Henry was at Marlborough in 1186.

Henry's confirmation is probably one of his charter of Ranulph Jernons. See Tait, R. 1921 and 1922.

Radunus Comes Cistercie. Omni bus Baronibus. Constabulariis. Balliuis. et omnibus et dominis et amicis suis
et anglis tam presentibus quam futuris. Salutem in eternum. Scitis in burgensibus nris de Conuict concessisse et dedisse et hac carta
mea confirmasse omnia que in presentia carta scripta sunt. Videlicet ut bene et honorifice et quare et in libo burgensio tenentur
prodicti burgenses et heredes sui de me et de heredibus meis sicut inquam in tempore patris mei ut aliqui antecessores meorum inclius et forius et
libius tenuerunt. Omnis autem liberis et bonis legibus illis concedo quas burgenses uniuersales inclius et libius habere et habere et de
seruando constabularius nris ne eos aliquis et inuestillum de p[re]latum ducatur et potius sum libe habere in quo omnia placita ad me
et ad illos pertinentia iuste tulerunt. Quenlibet autem ex fener ipsi per me elegerint qui sub me sup[er] eos iusticia faciat qui leges et consuetu
dines faciat et eos in consilio in omnibus rationabiliter omni et reuocari custodiat et in iura mea fideliter faciat. Si forte aliquis in
iuram meam incedere maluit sit tunc ab iure p[re]ballium meum et iudicis burgensium exiis. Quoscumque autem in iudicio secum
ad uille emendationem ad iudicium et iuramentum suum et nullus eis iniuriam faciat nisi eos in eam mittat. Si uero
aliquis extraneus in iudicio aliquid inueniens in uilla fecerit impetrator eadem iustis sup[er] dea sine et illud dirigat. Et si
testibus. Logo Constabulario castre. Logo seneschallo de motu. Et ad illos de mesnil d[omi]ni. Per Rodarum Symon Thuchet
Thomam dispensario. Joello de Loua. Vito castellanum. Joello baronem. Vito de honore. Logo de amulle. Logo de bus
seruile. Vito prior. Vito de baronibus h[ab]it. Vito de n[ost]ro. Et in alio Te. Apud Cour

ings of the court. These assemblies of poor and insignificant men, ignorant of the merest commonplace of knowledge, their minds filled with what to us appear strange and distorted notions of justice, have an enormous importance in our history. In these and similar gatherings the capacity of Englishmen for self-government, which has long been a distinguishing feature of the nation, was first tested, and throughout the centuries they formed an admirable political training for the people, an education which is invaluable in the first stages of a nation's growth.

Conspicuous among the little group of townsmen would be the bailiff, the earl's representative, a man whose yea and nay was very powerful among the lord's tenants, for was he not there to watch over the interests of his master, and arrange for the payment of fines and forfeitures which were his master's due?¹ By his side some fuller, weaver, baker, or prosperous agriculturalist would take his seat² as the justice, the elected representative of the townsfolk. A clerk would also be present, for from the time of Henry III. court records were strictly kept and enrolled. Probably not all the townsmen attended each meeting, but only such of them as were concerned in any suit, and even these—within reasonable limits—might plead *essoyné*, or a valid excuse for

¹ The townsfolk had not yet power to commute the fines and forfeitures for a fixed sum, called fee-ferm.

² For the association of the feudal lord's representative and the chosen official of the townsfolk in a town court see the case of Totnes (Green, *Town Life*, I. 252).

absence. What individual part was played by justice and bailiff in the hearing of suits it is impossible to tell, but we may infer that the misdemeanours of the townsfolk were made known to the court by a jury, drawn perhaps from every street or ward.¹ These men affirmed on their own knowledge, or on common report, that certain offences had been committed within the township. These offences were of a simple, trifling kind, those of a more serious nature being tried at higher tribunals, in the county court, or at the leet or criminal court of the earl of Chester.² A presentment, for example, would be made to the effect that Nicholas, the son of William, had let his cows stray over the mowing-grass in the field called Baron's Field, which is in the earl's demesne, thereby causing damage to the extent of fourpence. Nicholas is at mercy,³ for it is well known that he is guilty, and he is thrown on the mercy of the court. Let him pay the damage, and twopence in ad-

¹ We infer from analogy that presentments were made by a jury in this court. Norwich was—for judicial purposes—divided into four leets. Each leet was divided into sub-leets, these latter divisions being composed of as many parishes as would furnish twelve tithings. The head-man, or "capital pledge" of every tithing—a band of ten, twelve, or more citizens responsible for one another—made the presentment of anything, which had happened in his tithing, which came under the cognizance of the court. See Hudson, *Leet Jurisdiction in Norwich* (Selden Soc. vol. V.), xii.-xxvi.

² It is not clear whether the townsfolk at this period attended the earl's leet or the sheriff's court. They certainly attended the latter court in the time of Edward III. (Madox, *Firma Burgi*, 108-9).

³ *i.e.* has to be amerced, or fined.

dition for the fault. Or the jury say that Margaret, the wife of Anketil, took from the bakery of William of Stonelei two loaves, value one halfpenny, and afterwards defamed and struck Joan, William's wife, in the open street known as the Broadgate. And Margaret defends (denies) the deed; therefore it is adjudged that she come and make her law six-handed at the next court.¹ Or the jury declare that William, son of Guy, contrary to the assize of bread, whereby, if a quarter of wheat sell for 3s. 6d., the farthing loaf of wastel bread should weigh 42s., gives only 39s. weight of bread in the loaf, to the damage of his customers, the king's liege people.² Moreover, William was bidden at the last court to come and wage his law twelve-handed; this he has failed to do.³ Therefore he is at mercy. The fine is twelve pence. William cannot pay at once, but his pledges are John the Dyer and Thomas atte Gate.⁴

Such cases as these would be the everyday business of the local court; but civil matters also required a great deal of attention. Transfers of land were executed there, being witnessed by the principal suitors of the court. John

¹ *i.e.* appear with five of her neighbours, who swear that she is not guilty. This method of clearing the character by oath of the neighbours was called compurgation.

² Shillings and pence were used as weights. We still speak of "pennyweights" (Maitland).

³ Because no neighbours could be found to swear, therefore he is guilty.

⁴ Pledges or sureties for the fine. These cases are all imaginary, but drawn from analogous ones to be found in the Selden Society's publications, the *Nottingham Records*, etc.

the Smith, for example, would make over his house in Earl Street with all its appurtenances to Richard the Weaver and his heirs in return for an annual rent of fourpence, and would warrant it to him against all comers. Certain documents called indentures ¹ would then be drawn up in duplicate by the clerk, the names of the chief of the folk present appearing therein as witnesses to the deed. To one of the indentures the grantor fixed his seal, to the other the grantee, each retaining the copy to which the seal of the other party in the transaction was attached by way of title-deed.

At least twice a year the townsmen appeared before the sheriff,² at whose court criminal or "crown" pleas received a hearing, and who, in his military capacity, overlooked the muster-at-arms of the townsmen, and fixed what number of archers were to be levied for the king's service. The proceeds of this court, good of felons and the like, went to swell the royal treasury. The system of presenting criminals by means of a jury³ obtained here as in the town court, but in doubtful or serious cases

¹ So called because the parchment on which the two deeds were written was so cut (indented) that they would exactly fit or dovetail into one another when put together at any future time. Hundreds of these documents are now at Coventry. See Section C of Mr. J. C. Jeaffreson's catalogue of Corp. MSS.

² In cases where the lord of the manor was entitled to hold a leet or view of frankpledge, the tenants were exempt from attendance at the county court. In the "view of frankpledge" each testified that they were enrolled in a tithing or body of mutually responsible persons.

³ The direct ancestor of our modern Grand Jury.

the accused would be condemned or acquitted not in accordance with evidence, but through an appeal to the interposition of Providence by means of trial by ordeal or battle. Thus, a man who was thrown into the water was, if he sank, pronounced innocent, if he swam, guilty; or the one of two champions, who overcame the other in fight, was held to have proved his case. But these irrational methods of trial were falling rapidly into disfavour. The "ordeal" was forbidden at the Lateran council of 1216,¹ and the Saxons, who much disliked the Norman method of trial by battle, always sought in their local charters to win exemption from the necessity of having recourse to it. Step by step the modern jury system was introduced, which, whatever may be its faults, is the most workable method hitherto discovered of obtaining a more or less unbiassed verdict in any suit.

Another provision of the charter, as confirmed by Henry II., was possibly an expedient to remedy the disasters which had lately befallen the townsmen under Gernons and Hugh. It was necessary, if the town was to grow and prosper, to attract settlers from different parts, and to those seeking a home in Coventry the clause that "newcomers should be free from all [payments] for two years after they began to build" would be most welcome.² From this time no doubt the advent

¹ Green, *Hist. Eng. People*, 107.

² The conditions under which strangers were admitted into a town differed with the particular locality. A free craftsman would be admitted to citizenship by purchase. If a serf escaped from his master's estate, and lived unclaimed for a year and

of passing or abiding strangers was not infrequent, and the place began to put on the appearance of a thriving little thoroughfare town. The grant of a fair to the Earl's-men in 1217, and one to the prior some ten years later, brought stranger merchants within the town-gates.¹ The place was important enough to attract the Grey Friars thither before 1234,² and during the life of earl Ranulf Blondvil, a colony of Jews found shelter there under his protection.³ We know no more than the names, and now and then the occupations of the men of the place in the thirteenth century; for our enquiries among the land-transfers of the time can elicit nothing save the records of the sale of a tenement and curtilage by a William de Artungworth, "le drapier," or their purchase by Richard le Tailleur, hosier, or Richard de Mora, merchant. But even this bare enumeration of trades and callings show the advance made by the men of Coventry since the time when a handful of villeins and bondsmen tilled the lands that had been Godiva's at the taking of the Domesday Survey.

a day, he was as a general rule permitted to continue in the town. In Lincoln it was necessary that he should pay the town taxes during that period (Stubbs, *Select Charters*, 159). The townsmen, however, were careful not to obliterate the distinction between bond and free, and did not admit one of servile birth to citizenship (Pollock and Maitland, *Hist. Law*, I. 633).

¹ Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 161.

² The Grey Friars first came to England in 1224, two years before the death of S. Francis. They reached Oxford in 1225, and settled at Lynn, Yarmouth, and Norwich in 1226 (Jessopp, *Coming of the Friars*, 34-40).

³ *Close Rolls*, 123.

V

PRIOR'S-HALF AND EARL'S-HALF

IN Coventry we now enter upon a period where the townsmen not only sought to make good the privileges they had already won, but strove to gain, either by fair means or foul, such fresh concessions as they deemed necessary for their comfort and prosperity. The story of the struggle for liberty in English towns, though little known, is one of great interest. Though the whole thing is on a small scale, yet the narrative of events is no less stirring than the account of the revolt of a great nation. There was as fierce a conflict at S. Alban's among a score or two of men in 1327 as among tens of thousands in Paris at the Revolution. Few leaders of forlorn hopes have shown more desperate courage than the good folk of Dunstable, who were ready to brave not only the terrors of punishment in this world, but in the world to come, for, being cursed with bell, book and candle by the bishop and their prior, they said that they recked nothing of this excommunication, but were resolved rather "to descend into hell all together" than submit to the prior's extortions. And conceiving that they were likely to be worsted in the quarrel, they covenanted with a neighbouring lord for forty acres of land, preparing to leave their houses and live in tents ere they would pay the arbitrary tolls and

taxes the prior had laid upon them.¹ It is true there was no philosophic fervour about the mediæval burgher, no enthusiasm about liberty in the abstract. What he wanted was some small practical advantage his masters denied him.² All the townsman of S. Alban's asked at the beginning of the quarrel was, that he should be allowed to grind his corn at home instead of at the abbot's mill. But wanting this strongly and sorely, and seeing a chance of victory, he was willing to fight for it perhaps to the death.

So scanty is our information that we cannot tell to what extent political strife, which so frequently agitated the kingdom, was reflected in local quarrel, but undoubtedly these risings occurred more frequently in the unsettled reigns of Henry III,³ Edward II.⁴ and Richard II. Frequently the town divided into opposite political factions, as in Winchester, where the abbey upheld De Montfort, and the townsmen were ready to do battle for Henry III.⁵ May-be these high contending parties intervened occasionally in local quarrel. Whether the conspiracies of the malcontent lords under Edward II. had anything to do with the subsequent troubles at Coventry we cannot tell, but we are distinctly told that Edward II. and his favour-

¹ *Prior Richard and Monks in Cornh. Mag.* VI. 840.

² Thompson, *Municipal History*.

³ As early as 1213 there were disputes between the abbot and townsmen of Reading (Green, *Town Life*, I. 300). In 1264 a guild of 300 "and more" young men banded together in Bury S. Edmund's to resist the abbot (*Ib.* I. 296-7).

⁴ For S. Alban's see Thompson, *Municipal History*, 20 sqq.

⁵ Green, *Town Life*, I. 242.

ite Dispenser supported one party, and certainly after her husband's death queen Isabella was the champion of the other. But all the powers that be were eager to crush the alarming risings of the S. Alban's and Bury S. Edmund's men when, filled with wild hopes begotten of Wat Tyler's revolt, they made in 1381 a desperate effort to overthrow the tyranny of the local abbots, their respective masters.

Another point on which we would fain have further knowledge is the mutual assistance rendered by various towns in the struggle. The confederacy formed by the S. Alban's men with divers of the neighbouring boroughs and with London gives us a bare hint of the possibilities of widespread sympathy between townfolk in their efforts after freedom. Londoners probably saw that increased liberty would bring about more favourable opportunities for trade, and hence they supported Norwich in 1272, when the townsmen and the cathedral priory were engaged in fierce conflict.¹ The time also came when certain citizens of the capital lent their aid to the Coventry men, when the latter were in sore need, in so far as they went bail for divers of them lying under a grievous accusation of conspiracy against the prior and convent.

¹ Ashley, in *Eng. Hist. Rev.* IX. 753, cites *Liber Ant. Leg.* (ed. Stapledon), 145. A quarrel broke out between the convent folk and the townsmen at Norwich at a fair on Trinity Sunday, 1272. Several of the townfolk were killed. The citizens afterwards attacked the priory and burnt a church, and the city was in consequence laid under an interdict (Thompson, *Municipal History*, 125-28).

The struggle for freedom is, in Coventry, at first interwoven with an old quarrel existing between the tenants of the two lords who held the town between them; for we have seen that Coventry was divided into two lordships; on the one hand lay the property of the earls of Chester, the Earl's-half; on the other the Prior's-half, or the convent estate. The government of these two manors was absolutely distinct. The Prior's-men had no lot or part in the privileges conferred in Ranulf's charter, and the Earl's-men none in those the convent won from Henry III. The customs practised by the Earl's-men on one side of the street, and those followed by the prior's tenants on the other, might differ to a considerable extent. They attended different courts; some were compelled to pay dues from which their neighbours were exempt; the prior's tenants might be forced to carry their lord's harvest, or work on his estate; while the Earl's-men, as free burghers, had long since discontinued feudal labour. A priory tenant would stand in his lord's pillory, or hang on his gallows; an Earl's-man met his punishment at the castle, or the sheriff's court. While the convent tenants could very likely bring their butter, horse provender, or coarse cloth to sell in the market free of toll, another owing the earl fealty might have to pay a penny or more before his stall could be set up in the market-place. These differences of tenure, custom, and privilege, naturally bred disputes among the townsfolk, a frequent occurrence in those places wherein different lords held sway, dividing the allegiance of the inhabitants.

This division of the land, on which the town was built,

into different estates was not peculiar to Coventry ; it is a feature of most of the chief towns of England. In sea-port or border places of military importance, the area round about the castle—the castle fee—was under the rule of a royal officer, who was entirely independent of town authority. In many cases gifts from the king to some baron, or the pious offerings of some secular landowner to the Church, were answerable for the parcelling out of a town among different lords. In Bristol, Redcliffe was the hereditary fee of the Berkeleys. At Canterbury, the archbishop, the prior of Christ Church, and the abbot of S. Augustine's, held land and exercised judicial rights which brought them into frequent conflict with the town authorities. In London and the old Saxon capital, Winchester, these divisions were multiplied. The former, for many years after the Conquest, was composed of a mass of different sokes or jurisdictions,¹ while the bishop, the convent of S. Swithun, and various other ecclesiastical bodies, the king and queen, owned land in the latter city, took tolls and taxes, and in many cases held distinct courts. The city proper, governed by a mayor and corporation, represented but a fraction of the population of Winchester.

In all these places difficulties and disputes arose from time to time, either from the conflicting claims which the various authorities brought forward, or from mutual

¹ See Loftie, *London*, I. 156 *sqq.* In Stamford in 1275 four prelates and five other lords claimed to have court of their tenants (Maitland and Pollock, *Hist. Law*, I. 631).

jealousy and ill-will among the townsfolk. Now questions of trade came uppermost, as in the quarrel between the bishop and the citizens of Winchester concerning S. Giles' fair. Or, again, the question of jurisdiction was in debate. When Sir Maurice of Berkeley's officers arrested and imprisoned a burgess of Bristol on suspicion of murder, the mayor rang the common bell to assemble the townsfolk; crossed the bridge at their head, broke open the lord's gaol, and set the prisoner free.¹ It was the arrest of a servant of the chancellor in the cathedral precincts at Exeter that helped to bring about the famous quarrel between the corporation and the chapter of that city.² In many cases the causes of trouble passed away with some composition or purchase, which gave to one or other party supreme control in the matter under dispute. The men of Bristol, for instance, obtained from Edward II. the right of jurisdiction in Redcliffe Street, and their enmity with the Berkeleys died away. The fortunate Londoners were able to absorb the relics of independent authority within their walls, and bring the city under one government.³ But all towns were not in a like happy case. The mayor and corporation of Winchester never succeeded in making good their claims against the various landowners of the city, and the hardships of paying taxes in which their neighbours holding of the lay and secular lords bore no part, the difficulty of administering justice, when

¹ Hunt, *Bristol*, 61.

² *Shillingford's Letters* (Camden Soc.). Freeman, *Exeter*, 158-60.

³ Loftie, *London*, I. 160 sqq.

evil-doers had but to fly to another street—to the sanctuary in S. Swithun's liberty of Godbeate, for instance—to be free from arrest by the city officers, bore heavily upon this little community, and helped undoubtedly to bring the city to decay.¹

In Coventry there appears to have been some ill-feeling arising from a trading jealousy between Earl's-folk and Prior's-folk. The former were disposed, as early as the days of Henry II., to entertain some grudge with regard to the ordering of the market in the Prior's-half,² but we know no particulars of the grievance. So hotly, however, did the quarrel rage between them, that there were "debates, contentions, with killing of divers men,"³ in the streets. Doubtless, in the interests of peace, it was better that one or other of the contending parties should become predominant within the town, and force the other to consent to a compromise. The last earl of Chester being dead, and his successors, the De Montalts, men of little mark, the chance lay with S. Mary's convent; and an enterprising prior, William of Brightwalton, was not slow to avail himself of the opportunity. Hoping, so the convent folk afterwards declared, to allay the strife by uniting the two manors whereof the town was composed under one lord, he proposed to purchase the earl's estate, a scheme to which Roger de Montalt, being in need of money for a Crusade, was fain to agree. So in 1249 the

¹ Green, *Town Life*, I. 325-330.

² Earl Hugh forbade his tenants to meddle with the prior's markets (Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 159). ³ Burton MS. f. 109a.

latter resigned the manor into the prior's hand in return for a yearly rent of £108, and by this means the head of the convent became lord of the soil within the Earl's-half,¹ Prior's-men and Earl's-men alike holding of him house and land, and owing him homage, fealty, and yearly rent. It is true the Earl's-men still held their courts as of old time, but the profits of jurisdiction were paid, not to the earl of Chester's heirs, but to the prior and convent.² Henceforth the lay lords of this great family slip out of the city's history; the ruling power in the town is the great religious corporation which owed its existence to Saxon piety.

Whatever changes this transfer may have brought about, one thing is certain, it did not establish peace in Coventry. Twenty years later the old jealousy flamed up anew. In 1267 both townsmen and convent took advantage of Henry III.'s necessities to negotiate for a charter, but with a different result. The former obtained a bare confirmation of their ancient liberties,³ the prior, on the other hand, owing, belike, to his superior command of the purse, or in return for help he may have rendered the king in the late wars, was able to purchase fresh concessions for himself and his men. He was allowed to

¹ Dugdale, I. 162.

² Burton MS. ff. 63, *sqq.* 109, 98-100. The prior prays for the restitution of the franchise of the courts of portmanmote, leet, pypowders, etc. After 1267 the priory coroner took inquisition throughout the town in case of fire or violent death.

³ Quoted in *Inspeximus*, 17 Ed. II. (Corp. MS. B. 4); the date there given is Jan. 30, 51 H. III. (1267).

appoint coroners for the town, and further, licence was given to form a merchant guild among his tenants.¹ The grant of these graces brought about an outbreak in the Earl's-half. Hitherto, Earl's-folk and Prior's-folk had carried on their trade on fairly equal terms, but the new charter would bring about a revolution. The object of the formation of a merchant guild was to confine the trade of the district to its members; they would become local commercial monopolists. No wonder the Earl's-men resisted the foundation of this society. If it were once established, and they were excluded from its ranks, what a blow would be dealt to their prosperity. The guildsmen would make it impossible for them to trade under anything like favourable conditions. They might be mulcted by tolls; subjected to the annoying supervision of the guild officials in respect to the weight or quality of their goods; restrictions affecting the time, place, or manner of their selling might be imposed on them; or they might have to relinquish bargains they had closed in favour of the members of the guild merchant.

So when the terms of this new charter were known, the Earl's-folk rose in tumult, withstood the priory coroner when he attempted to see the body of a man, slain, no doubt, in these brawls, and prevented their neighbours in the Convent-half from forming the guild according to the permission vouchsafed to them. Nor could the sheriff's officer, sent by the royal order at the prior's request to proclaim these charters and liberties in

¹ Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 162.

Coventry, bring the unruly townspeople to obedience. "Certain men, we learn," ran the king's writ, "from those parts with others, armed with force, took Gilbert, clerk to the said sheriff, sent thither to this end, and imprisoned him, and broke" the royal "rolls and charters, and beat and ill-treated the men of the prior and convent."¹ What was the end of the tumult, or the fate of the luckless clerk, we cannot tell, but, as we hear no more of the prior's guild, it seems that this outbreak of the Coventry men "with others" prevented its establishment.

We now enter upon a fresh phase of the quarrel. It is no longer the Prior's-men but the prior himself who is the Earl's-men's enemy. Their whole energy is absorbed in the effort to free their trade from the restrictions the present lord of the Earl's-half has laid down for them to observe. For the Earl's-men appeared ill-content with the change of masters. Did the prior encroach upon the rights of the townsfolk? Probably not; previously established customs founded on the charter of Ranulf would bar his claims. But though the law may not alter, the interpretation of it may vary from time to time; so may the circumstances under which it is administered. It was so with the customs which had hitherto regulated the Earl's-men's lives. They and

¹ Merewether and Stephens, *Hist. Boroughs*, I. 469. The transcript of the MS. is given in Gross, *Gild Merchant*, II. 365. The expression "with others" is very significant; these were probably men from the country, who had hitherto been allowed to trade in the town, and feared the establishment of the guild.

their present masters were disposed to differ as to the meaning these could bear, and hence a way was opened for numerous quarrels and lawsuits. Moreover, restraints, which had been borne without complaint in early days under the Chester lordship, were found unendurable when the townsfolk's commerce, and with it their desire for freedom, had increased.

The matter of the merchant guild was only the forerunner of more serious trouble. The townspeople were rapidly growing rich, whether by soap-making,¹ or the manufacture of woollen cloth, or the entertainment of travellers, or a happy combination of all three sources of wealth. Under Edward I. they were able to pave their city,² which had now risen to a sufficiently important position to be accounted a borough, and to return two members to the Parliament of 1295.³ Its prosperity attracted the notice of Edward I., who in 1303 summoned two Coventry merchants to attend a council;⁴ and of Edward II., who asked the inhabitants for a loan of 500 marks for the prosecution of the Scotch war. It is small wonder if the townsfolk were jealous lest this growing prosperity should be checked by the petty regulations the prior chose to lay on them. Was their wealth to be

¹ Soap was made in the neighbourhood of Coventry about 1300. "Sope about Couentre." Robert of Gloucester, *Chron.* l. 143.

² Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 138.

³ *Parl. Writs*, I. lii.

⁴ Lawrence de Shepey summoned to attend a council of merchants at York in 1303 (*Ib.* I. 135). He had been burgess for Coventry in 1301.

curtailed because, forsooth, the convent officials charged them not to sell here, or make there, to relinquish a favourable bargain, or never to open stall or shop for sale of goods during certain hours of the day ?

The prior in the days of Edward II. was Henry Irreys, and his hand lay heavy on the townsmen. They were not able to live, they complained, "by reason of his oppression." Moreover, like the jolly, illiterate abbot of S. Alban's named Hugh, who "feared nothing so much as the Latin tongue,"¹ and so oppressed his tenants, prior Irreys was an ally of Edward II., for it was by "maintenance of the king and of Spencer, Earl of Winchester" (*i.e.* Despenser), that he was enabled to keep the malcontents in check. In his days arose a second dispute concerning traffic, but at what date we cannot tell. The Friday market had always been held in the Prior's-half, and there only were the Earl's-men permitted to sell their wares on that day.² Now certain of them broke through the prior's order, and sold openly in their own houses³ during market hours. Appeal was made to the law. In vain the townsmen pleaded that by virtue of the clause in Ranulf's charter, giving them the same liberties as the Lincoln folk, they were free to sell their goods when or where they would. Vainly, too, they tried

¹ Froude, *Short Studies*, III. 54. Edward II.'s overthrow was the signal for a rising against this abbot.

² Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 162.

³ It is probable that there were no shops, in our sense, in the fourteenth century. The traders' goods were kept in a cellar below the ground floor (Turner, *Domestic Architecture*, III. 36).

to strengthen their case by declaring that before the prior had purchased the Chester estate they had been wont to hold a fair in the Earl Street, where now their shops stood.¹ These pleas availed nothing, and a verdict was returned for the prior with £60 damages, the Earl's-men being forbidden to sell anywhere but in the Prior's-half during market hours. The prescribed payment must have well-nigh ruined William Grauntpee and other traders concerned in the struggle, for £60 was then accounted a great sum.²

The quarrel thus turned, as might easily have been foreseen, on the interpretation which might be given to the vague wording of Ranulf's charter. It was of importance that the terms of the charter should be exactly defined. The Earl's-men in 1323 were sufficiently well-to-do to purchase from Edward II. a confirmation of their ancient rights. It is true that this confirmation did not strengthen their hands against the prior. It seems as if special precaution was taken to give the clause, whereon the townsmen had of late grounded their defence, an interpretation which would afford them no support in a future quarrel. This clause, "that they are

¹ Compare the doings of the guild at Bury S. Edmund's in 1304. They distrained upon the goods of merchants who sold in the abbot's market, and hindered the execution of justice on those who sold elsewhere (Green, *Town Life*, I. 297).

² The value of £60 would represent more than £700 at the present time. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries the average price of an ox was 13s. 1½d.; of a sheep, 1s. 5d.; of a cow, 9s. 5d.; and a fowl, 1d. (Rogers, *Agriculture and Prices*, I. 361-3).

to enjoy the same customs as the Lincoln men," was, we are told, to be understood "by them and their heirs" as conferring only those rights which they and their predecessors had hitherto enjoyed.¹

It was in 1323 that the townsfolk sought, after a very novel fashion, to rid themselves of their oppressors. Their enemies accused them, whether truly or untruly we cannot tell, of having recourse to the black art, and strange rumours were afloat concerning the unlawful dealings of the citizens with one Master John de Nottingham, limb of Satan and necromancer, who inhabited a ruinous house in the neighbourhood of the town. Witchcraft was not then considered an ecclesiastical offence, but one against the common law, and it was, it seems, before the Court of King's Bench that the approver, Robert le Mareshall, told his story. He had been living, he said, with one Master John de Nottingham, necromancer, of Coventry. To whom, on the Wednesday next before the feast of S. Nicholas, in the seventeenth year of the king's reign, came certain men of the town, citizens of good standing, and promised them great profit—to the necromancer, £20, and "his subsistence in any religious houses in England,"² and to

¹ *Inspeximus*, 17 Ed. II. Corp. MS. B. 4. No doubt the insertion of this clause was the prior's doing. The prior of Dunstable paid £100 to Henry III. to have a clause inserted in a charter giving him the right to exercise claims—not hitherto exercised—over the burgesses of Dunstable (*Cornh. Mag.* VI. 838).

² Probably a corrody or daily allowance of food from the monastic table during the life of an individual. This ensured for the individual who held it a share in the prayers of the brethren, and sometimes included lodging within the monastery.

Robert le Mareshall, £15—if they would compass the lives of the king and others by necromancy. Having received part of the promised payment as earnest at the hands of John le Redclerk, hosier, and John, son of Hugh de Merington, apprentice of the law, with seven pounds of wax and two yards of canvas, the magicians began their work. On the Sunday after the feast of S. Nicholas they fashioned seven magical images in the respective likenesses of Edward II., with his crown, the elder and younger Despenser, prior Henry, Nicholas Crumpe, his steward, the cellarer of the convent, and Richard Sowe, probably one of the priory underlings who had made himself unpopular. As far as the last-named enemy upon the list was concerned—for upon him they chose to experiment “to see what might be done with the rest”—they were entirely successful. On the Friday before the feast of the Holy Rood about midnight John de Nottingham gave his helper, Robert le Mareshall, a leaden bodkin, with command to thrust it into the forehead of the figure of Richard Sowe. The effect was well-nigh instantaneous. When the necromancer sent Robert on the morrow to inquire how Richard did, the messenger found him crying “Harrow,” and mad as mad could be. And on the Wednesday before the Ascension, John having on the previous Sunday removed the bodkin from the forehead of the figure and thrust it into its heart, Richard Sowe died.¹

¹ Laud. MS. 290 & 533. It is the earliest trial for witchcraft extant in England. See also *Parl. Writs*, II. Div. 2. App. 269-70.

Meanwhile the necromancer and the accused gave themselves up in court, consenting to plead before a jury. All, save the necromancer, were admitted to bail.¹ He no doubt looked to receive no mercy, and when after sundry delays the trial came on, the marshal certified that Master John de Nottingham was dead. Another of the accused, Piers Baroun, who had been a burgess at the parliament of 1305,² died also during the interval. Others had fled from justice, though of these one Richard Grauntpee, without doubt a near relative of the man who had lost his suit with the prior in the matter of the market, afterwards came and surrendered himself in court. Either the sympathy of the neighbourhood was with the accused, or it was thought that Robert's tale was unworthy of belief, for a jury taken from the neighbourhood returned a verdict of acquittal. But the trial greatly embittered the feelings of the citizens, and when the tide turned, and they were able to do the prior hurt, they availed themselves of the opportunity gladly.

¹ Divers natives of Warwickshire and citizens of London went bail for them.

² *Parl. Writs*, I. 146.

VI

THE SEIGNIORY OF THE PRIOR AND QUEEN ISABELLA

HITHERTO it had fared ill with the Earl's-men in their struggle with the convent. Were they to be worsted like the men of S. Alban's or Bury S. Edmund's? The former were now utterly broken in spirit. After a hard fight lasting from the days of Henry III., they obtained in 1327 a charter, conferring on them the control over the local courts and the privileges of a free and independent borough. And yet they were powerless. Five years later they voluntarily surrendered their charter into the abbot's hands. They gave up the perambulation of their borough. They took their handmills—the initial cause of the contention—and left them in the churchyard in token of renunciation. They presented to the abbot the town chest with the keys belonging thereto, thus relinquishing all their rights as a free and independent community. Nor did better success attend the Bury S. Edmund's men, who had the same high hopes as the S. Alban's folk, and who in the same year compelled their abbot to concede to them a guild merchant, a community, a common seal, and the custody of their gates. Five years later they too were forced to abandon these claims, and, after a fruitless effort at the time of the

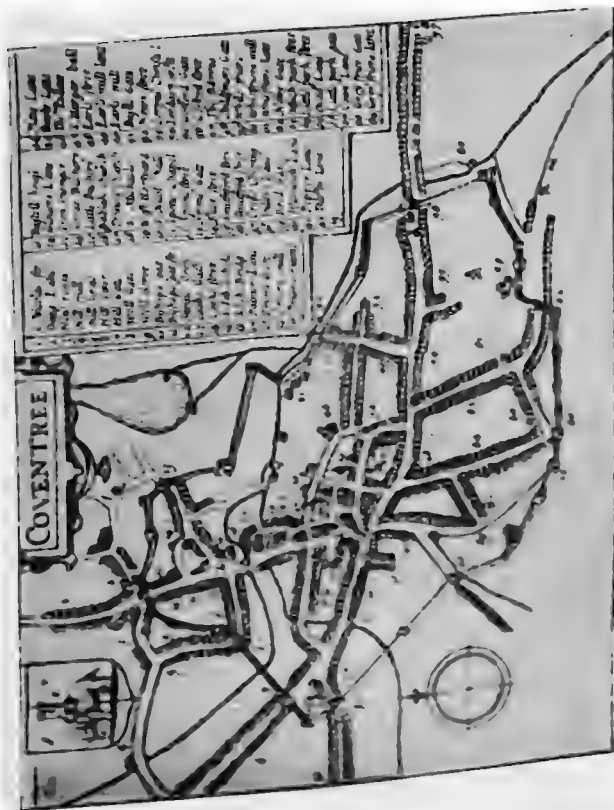
Peasant Revolt in 1381,¹ both towns sank into apathy, each under the rule of the great local religious house.

But alone among convent towns, a piece of supreme good fortune awaited Coventry. The townsmen, just at a critical time, gained a powerful champion. In 1327 the rents coming from the Earl's-half passed by bequest into the hands of Isabella, widow of Edward II., to become after her death parcel of the earldom of Chester, the heritage of successive princes of Wales. We have nothing to do with the rights and wrongs of the quarrel which raged for twenty years between the queen and her husband's old ally, the prior of S. Mary's convent. The undoubted gainers in this conflict were the men of Coventry; for, helpless under Isabella's repeated attacks, the monks conceded to their tenants those rights of free trading and self-government whereof they had stood in need so long.

Thirteen years after the queen's entry into possession of the De Montalt estate, the prior had many bitter complaints to make of the treatment he received at her hands and at the hands of his "mortal enemies," the men of Coventry. His courts were deserted by the men of the Earl's-half, the profits of his franchise finding their way, no doubt, into the queen's coffers, as her steward held a court at Cheylesmore.² His dues, waifs, heriots, the mournful enumeration proceeds, were withheld, and

¹ Thompson, *Municipal History*, 22 sqq. Green, *Town Life*, I. 298.

² The name of the manor house of the De Montalts.



EARLIEST KNOWN MAP OF COVENTRY
Published by John Speede, London, 1610.

certain tenements belonging to him seized into "my lady's hand" in spite of charters shown to prove his ample right to the same. Great destruction had been wrought in his woods at Whitmore under colour of the queen's claim to gather her "estovers," or fuel, therein. And the hedges about these woods had been violently thrown down, although the queen and her men had no rightful "claim of common"; and if "they be not now enclosed to prevent cattle from pasturing therein, they will be ruined for ever past recovery." The men of the Earl's-half lived in the prior's tenements in the earl's orchard, detaining the rent, twenty marks a year, "by tort and force." They seized, most likely in the form of distrain, one or two cartloads of corn, due to the prior for tithes, with seven horses and twelve beasts, and kept them for a full year or more, while several of the cattle died, for the which cause the prior and his brethren had been brought *en grandes anguisses et mescheif*.

But this was not the worst. By cover "of the Seignorie of my said lady," the prior continued, a great part of the rents in Coventry were treacherously withheld, and the monks dared not take distress and force the defaulters to pay "for peril of death." For when their bailiff, Simon Pakeman, went to demand the afore-said rents without making any distrain for the same, "up came Peter de Stoke and other mad folk . . . and assaulted the said Simon with force of arms, and beat and maltreated him, saying . . . that if the said prior and convent ever made any demand of the kind in the Earl's-half they would make their heads fly" (*ferryent*

voler les testes).¹ Again and again the prior and convent poured forth their monotonous complaint. Now they "prayed restitution" for the rent of two messuages, "which for two years last past my lady had given to a demoiselle of her chamber."² Now they averred that she had put the bailiff of the Earl's-half out of his office, whereby they had lost all profits arising from their franchises. Still the spoliation continued; they fixed the damage the convent had sustained at £20,000,³ and, turning from the deaf ears of queen Isabel, besought the king to see justice done for God's sake, "and for love of our Lady, his dear Mother, in whose honour the priory" had been founded, lest the convent should be compelled to disperse.⁴

Meanwhile the men of Coventry were gaining every year important graces from Edward III. Now that the power of the prior was thus diminished, there was no one to prevent the acquisition of fresh liberties, and their money circulated freely at Westminster, the messengers bringing back in return the precious slips of parchment sealed with the king's seal, the testimony of new rights to be enjoyed by the townsfolk. In 1334 their merchandise was freed from toll in all places throughout the

¹ Burton MS. f. 88. This appears to be the sense, but this portion of the document is missing from Burton's folio. I found it on a loose leaf in the *Leet Book*, copied in Norman French in a modern and rather illegible hand from the deeds which were in the Stanton collection of papers destroyed in the Birmingham library fire. See Appendix. ² *Ib.* f. 110a.

³ Burton MS. f. 63a. An incredible sum.

⁴ *Ib.* ff. 109-12.

king's dominions.¹ Six years later license was given them to form a merchant guild,² while other kindred societies sprang up, and received license to hold land in mortmain.³ In 1342 the king granted a charter to the effect that any inquisition of lands or tenements within the city should be taken by the townsmen, and not by strangers, an important provision at a time when there were frequent lawsuits between the queen and the prior.⁴

The convent give a graphic description of the effect of such an inquisition upon their holding, and of the plot between the queen and the Earl's-men which caused the enquiry to be made.⁵ "Then came the men of the Earl's-half of Coventry amongst others . . . conspiring and compassing the undoing of the said prior and his monks, and the Disinheritance and Destruction of their Church, and making show of their Intent unto my said Lady that her Seignorie was more largely than she had occupied. . . . Whereupon the Stewards and officers

¹ Corp. MS. B. 7; Merewether and Stephens, 650; Gross, I. 44.

² Corp. MS. B. 9; Gross, II. 49; Toulmin Smith, *Eng. Gilds*, 226.

³ These were S. John the Baptist, S. Catherine, the Corpus Christi, and the Trinity guilds, founded respectively in 1342, 1343, and 1364.

⁴ *Inspeximus*, 15 Ed. III. (Corp. MS. B. 7). This would be highly important in a trial taking place at the county court, where the sheriff might impanel a jury, not of townsmen, but of those in the country round, who would not be acquainted with the "metes and bounds" dividing the two estates. The prior of Dunstable was accused by the burgesses of introducing foreign jurors into the town (*Cornh. Mag.* VI. 837).

⁵ Burton MS. f. 110a.

of my said Lady, without having any power or commission of our Lord the King, took an Inquisition of the said Men, Adversaries to the said Prior and Convent, what were the Bounds in Ancient times of the Seigniorie of Earl Rondulph; which men quickly and Maliciously gave up the false verdict to the Damnation of their Souls. Saying that the Prior's-half, which is of foundation of the Church, is two little leys (meadows), whereon the profits by year are not above 50s. . . . and did fasten stakes of Division to Separate the Seigniorie of my said Lady from the Seigniorie of the said Prior." What made this action so particularly galling was that it was the "Seigniorie of the foundation of their Church" Isabel called in question, though they had held it, they declared, long time before the coming of the Conqueror, and before the earls of Chester, whose representative the queen was, had been heard of in England.

The prior's complaints availed nothing; the men of Coventry were in a sure way of victory, and in 1345 the city was incorporated by charter. The mayor, bailiffs, and community were henceforth to be responsible for the fee-ferm;¹ and power to hear and adjudge certain pleas, hitherto treated of in the county court, was given to the city officers. The prior and his brethren looked upon this as a last indignity. "They are become lords of the said prior, all whome beforetime were his tenants," and in consequence of the inquisition

¹ The fee-ferm rent, representing the king's rights over the fines, forfeitures, etc., taken from criminals, was fixed at £50 a year.

above mentioned, he and his brethren were now "entirely involved within the danger of the mayor and his bailiffs for they had not a foot of land of their Seigniorship" beyond the priory gates.¹

Wearied of a struggle which had lasted for twenty years, the litigants, the queen, the prior, and the newly-made corporation allowed the dispute to be set at rest once and for all in 1355, and the "Indenture Tripartite" made between them took the form of a compromise. Each of the three parties agreed to restore or forego the exercise of certain rights, or at least to accept an equivalent. The prior gave up all claim to jurisdiction over the Earl's-men, and the queen forgave him £10 of the yearly ferm owing to her, while the franchises he thus relinquished—the right of holding view of frankpledge and other courts with the exercise of the coronership—Isabel bestowed on the mayor, bailiffs, and community. These in their turn agreed to indemnify the convent by a payment of £10 a year.

The prior's jurisdiction over his own territory was saved, but the tenants of the other "Half" were bound to answer for their delinquencies before the officers of the corporation. Meanwhile the prior's tenants were to be taxable with the Earl's-men, and to serve as mayors and bailiffs with their fellow-citizens. The restrictions on buying and selling, which had given rise to the lawsuit in the former reign, were wholly laid aside. "Any persons of whatsoever condition they be, may sell any

¹ Burton MS. f. 111a.

manner of wares in the Earl's-part, or buy at what day or time it shall please them, and they shall not be disturbed by the officers of the prior and convent." And although the market was to continue to be held as of old in the Prior's-half, no toll was to be taken, according to the ancient custom, except for horses, while all the regulations concerning sale and merchandise should henceforth "be at the ordinance of the mayor and community." The assize of bread, ale, and victuals was to be kept by the mayor; and though the prior was to have all the profits arising from the fines of offenders against the assize, the officers of the corporation could enter the convent half, and, in case the prior's officers neglected to punish fraudulent brewers and bakers, could levy fines upon these evil-doers and see justice done.

Various restitutions were made on the queen's part, showing that she and her advisers were really intent on a peaceful solution of the difficulty. The advowson of chapels, chantries, and the like, which she had appropriated, were restored to the prior, who, in his turn, forgave all the delinquencies of the Earl's-men against himself.¹ The "Tripartite" was drawn up so clearly, and in so fair a spirit, that in essentials it was never afterwards called in question. Disputes arose between the convent and the townsmen in later days, it is true, but not concerning the all-important matters of trade and jurisdiction. Nevertheless, this compact put an end, once and for all, to the prior's dominion in

¹ Burton MS. ff. 98-103.

Coventry. Henceforth, in recounting the history of the place, we have little concern with the convent; our subject touches only upon the rule and fortunes of the mayor, bailiffs, and community of the city.

Coventry was now an independent corporate borough. The townsmen had power to elect their own officers—the mayor, bailiffs, coroner, and so forth—and were free, save in a few cases, from the sheriff's jurisdiction. They had complete control over their own money affairs, and after the royal fee-ferm of £50 a year, and the prior's ferm of £10 a year, had been paid, they were at liberty to put the remainder of their revenue to what use they would.¹

¹ The liberties granted by Isabella to be summed up thus:—
(1) The townsmen may duly elect their own mayor and bailiffs.
(2) They have cognizance of pleas, of trespasses, contracts, covenants, and all other business amongst themselves. (3) There is to be a seal for the recognition of debts. (4) Mayor and bailiffs to have profits of view of frankpledge with the court, to have control over the gaol, fair, market, etc., and in return a ferm of £50 to be paid to the queen and her heirs (Corp. MS. B. 11).

VII

THE CORPORATION AND THE GUILDS

THERE is hardly any subject on which ordinary folk, especially members of large communities, are so ignorant as local government. There is hardly one in which, until lately, they took so little interest. This ignorance is no doubt, in a measure, owing to the complexity of the subject; for never was there such “a mighty maze,” but “without a plan,” as local rule under the present system, and the apathy may be due to the fact that nearly every citizen feels there is little need for his exertions. Things go on very well—no one knows quite how—under the management of a few individuals, who have the time and energy for the task. The dust-cart and the rate-collector come round as regularly as clockwork, and it is only the curious who have the interest to inquire into the mechanism of this system who open the clock-case and examine the works. Then, too, in a large community, the few who preside over local affairs are unknown to, and out of touch with, the bulk of their fellow-citizens for whose welfare they make provision; and it is only when some local abuse or reform touches very nearly a man’s property or person, that he rouses himself to inquire into the doings of councillors and guardians, of whose names he is pos-

sibly quite ignorant. No doubt another reason for this lack of interest lies in the fact that the local authorities have lost a great deal of the power of initiative they once possessed. Owing to the efficiency of the various departments of the central government, men have the authority of the state, rather than that of the county or municipality, before their eyes. Increased ease of communication has much to answer for in this matter. London, as the seat of government, has attained to a degree of activity and importance impossible to conceive in the days of slow travel under the Plantagenets; and the general modern tendency to substitute the work of highly-trained and state-paid officials for the rough-and-ready discharge of duty on the part of the local authorities, has deprived many a man or office of occupation or vitality. It is, for example, to the War Office, and not to the sheriff, that the militia looks for direction. The importance of the mayoralty has diminished with the rest. Useful for social and charitable purposes, and even necessary for the discharge of business of which the public has but an ill-defined conception, the modern mayor presents but an insignificant and shrunken figure in comparison with his worshipful predecessor in the days of the Plantagenets. It is not only that the splendour and pageantry have vanished from municipal life, but with the red cloak and velvet tippet, with all the great processions and shows of grandeur, there has also departed some of the real significance which once attached to local authority.

The story of the decline of municipal and local in-

stitutions is a long one, and dates from the building up of a strong central government under the Tudor kings. It is true that the English municipalities had a longer lease of life than the French *communes*,¹ which were crushed after a brief existence by the despotic kings of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; for it was not until two hundred years later that they sank into gradual decay. Long periods of internal peace lessened the need for the exercise of extraordinary powers by local authority; while the gradual rise of London, its growth in commercial, financial, and political importance, so apparent to any one who studies the part played by the city during the Great Rebellion, tended to diminish the wealth the country towns possessed and the consequence in which they were held. It has been said,² that when Elizabeth ascended the throne the commercial centre of the world was Antwerp; when she died, the commercial centre of the world was London. And though England was to be a great gainer by the change, the centralization of trade involved local suffering and local loss. The men of Coventry, under the Stuarts, complained that their trade had departed from them. Their city, they tell us in 1635, had once been "as London is now," a centre for the traffic of the northern and western parts;³ a comparison which falls oddly on modern ears, so completely has London out-distanced its petty rival in the race for commercial supremacy.

¹ See Luchaire, *Les Communes Françaises*, *passim*.

² Besant, *London*, 227.

³ Corp. MS. A. 35: Burton on Ship-money,

Meanwhile, as far as internal government was concerned, the towns went rapidly from bad to worse; for the close corporations, by whose authority they were governed, admitted of little progress under their dominion. Abuses crept in unchecked by popular control, and the remodelling of the charters under Charles II. increased the natural tendency of the ruling bodies to exclusiveness and corruption.¹ The corporations sank into the last stage of senile decay, until the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 remedied glaring abuses and put some order and coherence into their methods of rule. There has been of late years a slight increase in the prestige of local authority, and a quickening of interest in local government. The mayors of flourishing towns, such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool, can rejoice in a position which carries with it a measure of power and dignity; while there still remain about the corporation of London, which was untouched by the Act of 1835, traces of mediæval splendour and greatness.

But to see municipal institutions at work in their full vigour we must look back to the Middle Ages. The men of the town put into the town politics something of the zest and spirit which is now only reserved for party

¹ The corporation of Helston, in Cornwall, by virtue of a charter of incorporation given in 1585, had power to admit any "honest" inhabitants to be freemen of the borough. This, however, they obstinately refused to do. So that in 1774 the corporation consisted of but six members, and these six elected two members of Parliament (Jessopp, *Studies of a Recluse*, 138-9).

struggles involving questions of national interest. The ordinances passed by the town rulers, and their methods of administration, could affect each citizen's life to an extent we can hardly realize. The municipal authorities decided, sometimes on their own initiative, at others in response to the statutes promulgated by the central government, of what material a man's house was to be built;¹ even of what ingredients his food was to be made;² whether he should starve in case of famine, or have grain supplied by the storehouses of the city, for difficulties of communication hindered traffic, and in years of bad harvest nothing but the forethought of the town officials³ in storing corn could save the citizens from great distress. The authorities ordained precisely at what hour a man should buy or sell in the market,⁴ and who were to be his customers.⁵ The clothes he wore,⁶ the wages he

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 219. An order of leet was passed to the effect that houses were not to be thatched with straw.

² *Ib.* f. 328a. No inhabitant of S. Michael's parish was allowed to put more wheat but "the teyre of three strike" of wheat into the holy cake under pain of a fine of 20s., and not to make "bun nor cake besides," and those of Trinity parish were allowed the "teyre of two strike."

³ In 1520 the mayor, John Bond, ordered the amount of grain in each ward and the number of citizens to be registered (*Ib.* f. 330). On the custom of storing corn in times of dearth, see Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* I. pt. II. 33-7. The mayor of London in 1438 sent ships to Dantzic for corn.

⁴ Men of the town could buy corn in the market at nine o'clock, those of the country at twelve (*Leet Book*, f. 326a).

⁵ Butchers were forbidden to sell hides "in great," i.e. wholesale, to the tanners (*Ib.* f. 273a).

⁶ Those of the sheriff's degree were ordered not to wear velvet

took, the profits and losses of his trade, his manner of dealing with his workpeople, the price he gave, or asked, for any article of merchandise, all these common occurrences of daily life were the subject of municipal surveillance and regulation. The corporation guided and controlled the guilds or insurance companies, to which the town-folk subscribed their mite in the hope of getting a good provision for old age, and an honoured burial after death. They ruled and controlled those other guilds, the craft fraternities, whose members met together to discuss and frame decisions on all points of their trade or handicraft, so that there was no matter of any moment touching the citizens' lives which was not discussed and made the subject of legislation in the guildhall or council house at the meetings of court and council. They governed, as it were, each man's going-out and coming in, nay, they even defended his very life by building the fortifications which engirt the town wherein he dwelt. For should political strife or civil war arise, the lives or fortunes of the town-folk might be saved or jeopardized by the town rulers' action.¹

Knowing how far-reaching was the power of the town rulers, how absolute their sway over the action of their fellow-citizens, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the gift of a charter of incorporation. Coventry became in 1345 a free and independent borough, that is

unless "noted to be . . . of the substance of £300" (*Ib.* f. 334a).

¹ Cf. the action of Bigod, who devastated Norwich because of the citizens' support of Henry II.

to say, the affairs of the town were henceforward to be managed by the elected officers of the townsfolk, not by the nominees of the prior, the earl of Chester, or, except within certain well-defined limits,¹ those of the king. By the terms of the royal charter these duly elected officers had power to try pleas in the city courts, arrange for the recovery of debts, supervise the town gaol, and deliver up offenders to judgment, serve the royal writ concerning the processes of the king's court,² pay the ferm of £50 to the royal exchequer, in short perform much of the business hitherto discharged by the officers of the lord of the manor, or the central government.

In order that these new privileges could be utilized for the benefit of the community, it was necessary that courts should be reorganized, regulations passed, officials elected, in short the whole municipal administration shaped to fall in with the new order of things.³ We know nothing of the manner in which this was done, and as so many of the early records have been lost, we can give no account in many cases of the form of municipal rule chosen at this time by the citizens. Here and there curious documents give us a glimpse of the working of certain courts, or the municipal action of this or that body of men. But the information concerning very important points is unfortunately lacking. We are referred, for instance, to

¹ For instance, the itinerant justices tried criminals at the assizes.

² On return of writs see Pollock and Maitland, *Hist. Law*, I. 571.

³ For the solemn consultations this necessitated see the case of Ipswich, Gross, *Gild Merchant*, I. 23.

the "old custom" of electing officials, but we are not told what the old custom was, and are hence left in ignorance of the manner in which the election was made.

The men who took the lead in framing the constitution were surely the same as had previously won from the king the charter of freedom.¹ Belonging to the old well-to-do merchant² families of the place, these men had doubtless held office in the prior's time, serving may-be on the jury of the portmanmote or leet. They were thus familiar with the details of local administration, and stepped without difficulty into the higher posts the acquisition of the charter had prepared for them.³ With the ready legal knowledge characteristic of the men of the Middle Ages, they proceeded with as much care and speed as possible to carry the provisions of the charter into effect. Some time elapsed before the whole system could be brought into working order, the rock ahead being no doubt the prior's enmity. Three years after the incorpora-

¹ The mayor lists give twelve names of men who won the freedom of the city.

² See note 3.

³ Four of the twelve served afterwards as mayor, some others as bailiffs of the city. We may note that the leading families under the prior still continue to take the foremost place after the incorporation. Thus to Laurence de Shepey, member of Edward I.'s assembly of merchants (*Parl. Writs*, I. 135), and in 1301 member for the borough, succeeded Jordan de Shepey, whose name is yet commemorated in Jordan's well, second mayor of the city and first master of the guild merchant, (*Gross*, II. 49). A parallel case is shown in the Kelle family. Robert was burgess in 1298 (*Parl. Writs*, I. lii.), and Henry one of the founders of the Trinity guild in 1364, and four times mayor of the city.

tion one John Ward took his seat as the first mayor of the city, and in 1355 one of his successors, turning a firm front to the prior, who, as we have seen, was deeply offended at seeing his former tenants exalted to the position of mayor and bailiffs, brought the old feud to a conclusion, and by the terms of the "Tripartite" freed the courts of the city from any control exercised by the convent in times past.

Meanwhile the organization of the city courts had been rapidly pushed forward. Summoned in 1354 to account for the withdrawing of certain pleas from the county courts to those of the city, thus creating an annual deficit in the sheriff's ferm, the townsmen produced their charter, claiming to be exempt from shire jurisdiction in pleas concerning contracts, trespasses and covenants.¹ Conflict with the royal manorial officers of Cheylesmore was likewise averted in 1375, when a charter was obtained from the Black Prince forbidding his officers, under pain of a fine of twenty marks, to interfere in any matter within the city liberties, which at that time were marked off by well-known boundaries from the royal estate.² Two years later all pretext for the sheriff's interference in matters military was done away; in commissions of array for billmen and bowmen the mayor's name was joined to those of the commissioners, in order that he might equip the

¹ Madox, *Firma Burgi*, 108-9.

² Charter of the Black Prince (Burton MS. f. 251a). They were forbidden to make arrests, or distrain for debt, etc.

number of citizens demanded for the public service, and make provision for their payment.¹

While the corporation battled with the powers without, and, sealing their victories by compact and charter, gained exemption from all "foreign" interference, the city grew and flourished; guilds were founded, churches built, and the walls began to rise from the day that Richard Stoke, the mayor, laid the first stone in 1357 at the New Gate. But increased powers brought complications in their train, and the improvements the need for heavier internal taxation. Tolls laid on vendibles, if they brought money to the public purse, were highly unpopular, and in 1372 the patent giving license for their collection for walling purposes was revoked; rich men, it was declared, would be assessed henceforth "according to their ability." Richard II., who was ever a good lord to the citizens, permitted them to quarry for stone for walling purposes in Cheylesmore Park, and soon after the Peasant Revolt in 1381, when it was thought expedient that so important a town as Coventry should be well fortified in case of a future outbreak,² he likewise bestowed on the corporation a yearly ferm of £24 due to the royal exchequer from sealing pieces of cloth within the city.³

In spite of difficulties surmounted and victories gained

¹ Charter 1 Rich. II. (Burton MS. f. 252a).

² I am indebted for this explanation of the motive of the king's generosity to Mrs. J. R. Green.

³ On the assize of cloth and the measuring and marking of the material by the royal "aulnager," see Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* I. pt. I. 181.

towards the end of the century many troubles arose for the corporation. Complaints were heard on every side of the corruption of the ruling class, and the commonalty set order at defiance, reviled the mayor in the town-hall and sought occasion to break out in riot and tumult. The reason of this discontent is not far to seek. The few wealthy merchants who ruled the city were in no way responsible to their fellow-townsfolk for their actions or methods of rule, and were said by the community to abuse this authority. Theoretically, these officers were the elected servants of the community; and the common consent could alone make valid any regulations they passed; but it was very rarely that theory corresponded with practice.

Oligarchies held full sway over by far the greater number of the towns of England. The "menus gentz," in spite of many protests, were excluded from taking part in the elections of officers in London; and the general assembly of townsfolk who, as at Ipswich in 1200,¹ carried by acclamation the first ordinances framed by the newly-elected officers after the purchase of a charter of liberties, soon found that these delegates in passing any measure could afford to dispense with the common consent. Here and there we find the "general assembly" in full vigour, voting on the mayor's election, as at Sandwich, or, as at Hereford, debating on any matter "touching the state of the city" and the common weal.² But

¹ Gross, *Gild Merchant*, I. 23, II. 115; Green, *Town Life*, II. 223.

² *Ib.* II. 225-6.

these would seem exceptional cases, and it was only when questions concerning common property, or the assessment of royal taxation and the like, were treated of that the community was universally recognised as having the power to make any measure valid or invalid by giving or withholding its consent.

The engrossing by the few of all municipal power, so common a feature in town life, is probably due, in this instance, to the growth of a guild organization side by side with the development of municipal institutions. Variouslly attributed to a Greek, Roman, or German origin, these associations, common throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, all testify to the benefit gained by union and combination. The earlier forms of guilds known in England were the "Frith" or "peace" guilds, found before the Norman Conquest at Abbotsbury, Woodbury, Cambridge, and Exeter. These societies afforded mutual protection to their members, and made good any loss they sustained from an insurance fund to which they were all contributory. In all these bodies the convivial element was strong; the members frequently met to hold a feast, of which the remains were distributed in alms. Similar associations for the preservation of the peace are found on the Continent, one of the most noteworthy existing at Roeskild under king Canute for the suppression of the piracy of the Vikings. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these organizations were diverted to purposes of trade, and a third of all the towns of England—London being a doubtful exception—possessed their merchant guild or body of

traders and handicraftsmen, engrossing the local commerce to the exclusion of all men without their ranks. The craft guild was a century behind the merchant guild in its rise and development. Its members met together to make rules, by which all who practised a particular calling in the locality were to be directed in all affairs connected with their trade or handicraft. They devoted some of their revenue to religious uses, the members frequently supporting some church or chapel, or providing candles for altar or processional lights. Other local guilds not definitely commercial, but rather social, in character, often called after some saint, were active in the performance of all good works; they clad the poor in their livery, supported churches, colleges of priests and grammar schools, and pensioned decayed and deserving members.¹ At Coventry, however, the character of these associations, although they earned a fair reputation for charity, was not altogether what it appeared on the surface. The great Trinity guild, which meets us at every turn in the city's history, was primarily an association which, by some compact of which we are ignorant, early arrogated to itself the power wielded by the municipal rulers.

This society, with its fellow-guild of the Corpus Christi, is unheard of in the early days of the rule of the corporation. But its history is foreshadowed in that of its predecessor, the guild merchant of S. Mary.

¹ *Encyc. Brit. s.v. Guild*; Gross, *Gild Merchant*; Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds* (E. E. T. S.).

Founded in 1340, five years before the incorporation of the city,¹ it is possible that it was to this and kindred associations which sprang up around it, and to the gifts of their members in land and money,² that the townsmen owed the purchase of the incorporation charter. The zeal shown by S. Mary's guild for commerce and religion may well have served to cloak its essential character. For although the convenience of the merchants of this inland city, who, we are told, "auoient si grand trouble entour leur merchandises pur loynteignnite de la meere,"³ formed a pretext for the formation of the society in 1340, the time for assuring the monopoly of local traffic to a merchant guild was now past.⁴ No doubt the prior understood better the character of these foundations, recognising how they would form at the first a rallying point for the Earl's-men in league against him.⁵ And it may have been owing to his opposition as lord of the soil that the guild merchant had so much ado to acquire

¹ *Rot. Pat.* 14 Ed. III. p. 2. m. 21.

² For instance, Walter Whitweb, one of the twelve who won the charter of freedom, was master of S. Mary's guild in 1353 (*Corp. MS. C.* 148).

³ Gross, II. 49. This occurs in a report drawn up in 1389 by the master of the guild. "They had so much difficulty about their merchandise by reason of the distance from the sea."

⁴ The statute of 1335, by declaring that all merchants might traffic with whomsoever they would, and in what vendibles they chose, effectually did away with this monopoly of the merchant guild (Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* I. pt. I. 84).

⁵ I am indebted for this interpretation of the fact to Mrs. J. R. Green.

license to hold lands in mortmain for upwards of forty years after its foundation.¹

The fraternity of S. John the Baptist,² founded two years later than the merchant guild, was more fortunate in obtaining the coveted license. Its early patrons, wealthy traders, such as Walter de Stoke, member of one of Edward III.'s merchant assemblies,³ or Peter of that name, who made that memorable attack on the convent bailiff, Simon Pakeman, when he came to collect the rents in the Earl's-half, resolved to commemorate their union by a great achievement. The stately church of S. John the Baptist—saint dear to clothworkers and woolstaplers—rose on ground at Bablake, granted by queen Isabel to the fraternity. A college of priests, whose number was in 1393 increased to nine, officiated at this church, and lived on the bounty of the brotherhood;⁴ while the brethren of S. Catherine's guild, licensed in 1343, employed three priests to sing in the chapel sacred to their patroness in S. John's hospital in Bishop Street.⁵ But the priests of the merchant guild, as was meet, occupied from the beginning the most honourable place of all. They sang their "solemn anti-

¹ Toulmin Smith, *Eng. Gilds*, 231. In the return of 1389 it is stated that several messuages worth £37 12s. 4d. a year are waiting for the license of the king and the mesne lords to be given to the guild. No doubt the Statute of Mortmain was often evaded. The corporation records show that the guild held house property as early as 1353 (Corp. MS. C. 148).

² *Rot. Pat.* 17 Ed. III. p. 1. m. 17.

³ *Rot. Parl.* II. 457.

⁴ Sharp, *Antiq.* 130 2.

⁵ *Ib.* 159.

phonies" in the lady-chapel of S. Michael's, the great parish church of the Earl's-half, a practice which was still continued after the title of the guild became merged in the yet more famous society of the Trinity; ¹ while the guild of the Corpus Christi, composed, it would seem, of the prior's tenants, occupied the corresponding chapel in the parish church of the Trinity.²

Having overcome in fair fight their old adversary, the prior, the guilds turned their attention to municipal business. It became the custom in very early times for the same man to serve in different years as mayor and master of the merchant fraternity.³ The town hall of S. Mary, in which not only the guild feasts were held but municipal business⁴ was transacted, and the town chest as well as the guild plate⁵ stored, tells by its name of its connection with S. Mary's brotherhood. The vaulting of the entrance porch of this building still bears on its keystone a carving which represents the coronation of the Virgin Mary, the fraternity's chief patroness.⁶ Nor must the religious achievements of the guilds of S. John and S. Catherine make us forget their municipal significance.

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 24-5.

² *Ib.* 81.

³ Many early mayors were masters of the guild merchant; the cases of Jordan de Shepey and Walter Whitweb have been noted. In William Holme, master in 1356 (Corp. MS. C. 153), we have undoubtedly William Horn of the mayor-lists.

⁴ Sharp, *Antiq.* 211. The guild hall was used for municipal purposes as early as 1388.

⁵ *Ib.* 212.

⁶ In Mantes the guild "aux marchands" was one with the "confrérie de l'assomption de la Vierge" (Luchaire, *Communes Françaises*, 84).

Closely allied in character, formed no doubt of men of the same class, and with identical objects, these bodies actually coalesced between 1365 and 1369 with the guild merchant. In the meantime each no doubt contributed its share towards the common need; and although they were careful that none should hold them responsible for the fee-ferm, they were doubtless expected to contribute towards the annual rent of £50 due to the royal exchequer.¹

But these united guilds were destined in their turn to be absorbed by one great all-embracing fraternity, known sometimes by its full title of the guild of S. Mary, S. John the Baptist, the Holy Trinity, and S. Catherine, sometimes, for brevity's sake, as the Trinity guild. Licensed in 1364, either to smooth over difficulties in the way of fresh charters of mortmain, or to strengthen the hands of the merchants against the lower class of townfolk who threatened to become mutinous, the Trinity guild joined the ranks of the other guilds, and the union between these societies, which had taken place informally before 1369, was ratified by patent in 1392,²

¹ We learn in 1384 that the annual ferm of £10, due to the prior according to the terms of the Tripartite, had been drawn "time out of mind" from the coffers of the guild (*Leet Book*, f. 5a). Directly the guild lands were confiscated in 1545 the corporation made a great outcry concerning their poverty. They had, they declared, no lands whence they might derive an income to meet the yearly ferm of £50, and in trying to discharge it one or two of the citizens were yearly ruined (Vol. of Correspondence, f. 63, Corp. MS. A. 79).

² *Rot. Pat.* 16 Rich. II. p. 1. m. 19. The guilds of S. Mary and



A Bas-relief on the roof of the porch of S. Mary's Hall, shewing the Coronation of the Virgin.

BAS-RELIEF ON THE ROOF OF THE PORCH OF S. MARY'S
HALL, SHEWING THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN.
(From an old Print.)

when the guild revenues were increased to the amount of £86 13s. 4d. a year. The completion of S. John's church became the especial care of the united—or Trinity—guild, and the dues taken at the Drapery, a house belonging to the society, where cloth brought to the city by strangers was sold, were devoted to this purpose.¹

In these transactions much was effected of which documents and records make no mention. There can be little doubt that the Trinity guild was in reality only the guild merchant under another name, and with the control over a fuller purse. There is also little doubt that this body, together with the Corpus Christi, founded in 1348, and composed, it would seem, of the prior's tenants,² was but another name for the governing body of the town.³ In spite of many safeguards taken to prevent the seizure of guild property for the payment of municipal debt, we catch sight very frequently of this near connexion with, or identity of, the guilds and corporation.⁴ Probably only those who were admitted to both guilds were

S. John were united as early as 1362 (Corp. MS. C. 159). Sharp says that the union took place between 1365 and 1369 (*Antiq.* 131); but in a deed executed in 1372 the guilds mentioned are SS. Mary, John the Baptist, and Catherine (Corp. MS. C. 165).

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 131.

² The boundaries of the Prior's-half correspond roughly to the modern boundaries of Trinity parish. The meeting-place for members of Trinity parish and of the Corpus Christi guild was S. Nicholas' Hall (*Leet Book*, f. 47).

³ Cf. the guilds of Lynn and Plymouth (Green, II. 217, 220).

⁴ I am indebted for this suggestion to Mrs. J. R. Green.

eligible for municipal office.¹ While as justice of the peace, juryman of the leet, member of the mayor's council, and one of the keepers of the common treasure chest, the master of the Trinity guild was, saving the mayor, the foremost figure in the corporation. His connection with the mayoralty was very close. Two years before entering upon office each mayor was master of the Corpus Christi, and two years after quitting it master of the Trinity guild. The control they exercised over the revenues of the guilds, which were often put to municipal uses, gave these masters much power and authority in the city councils. The guilds joined their funds with those of the wardens to pension deserving townsfolk² and pay the salary of the recorder.³ Alone the Trinity guild discharged the ferm of £10 due to the prior, receiving a share of common land to be held in severalty—that is separate from the lands of the community—as compensation. Indeed the guild officers were so clearly considered as officers of the corporation that when they, together with the city wardens and chamberlains, neglected to present their accounts at the annual audit⁴ they were one and all brought to book by the leet, and

¹ This is to be inferred from a rhyme written in defence of Laurence Saunders, an opponent of the governing class, whose name, as a late officer of the corporation, was on the roll of those liable to be summoned to the mayor's council, and to be accounted a "brother" of the mayor.

"Ye cannot deny that he is your brother,

And to both guilds he hath paid as well as another."

(Sharp, *Antiq.* 235.)

² *Leet Book*, f. 18.

³ *Ib.* f. 334a.

⁴ *Ib.* f. 171.

ordered to remedy their neglect under pain of punishment. Jealous lest other societies should threaten their dominion, the mayor and bailiff obtained three several times patents forbidding the formation of guilds other than those already existing within the city.¹ And the meetings of the guilds of S. Anne and of S. George, formed by the journeymen tailors in the first quarter of the century, were suppressed by royal command under the pretext that their meetings were to the manifest destruction of the ancient foundations, the guilds of the Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi.² And it was perhaps when the commonalty chafed at their rule, or brought to light some infringement of the law on the part of the Trinity guild, that the fraternity purchased pardon at Westminster granting them immunity for past misdeeds.³

These bodies, so closely united by interest and friendship, lent all their strength to support the rulers of the city, and the authority, thus securely buttressed, of the mayor and the small circle of late and present magistrates gathered around him, was such as no opposition could break. All offices of trust were filled by a few leading men. The mayor, bailiffs and aldermen⁴ tried pleas for

¹ Corp. MS. B. 35. Letters patent against the formation of new guilds, dated Nov. 8 H. IV (1406). This was confirmed in 1414 and 1441 (B. 38 and 47).

² Corp. MS. B. 40; B. 41; B. 43.

³ Corp. MS. B. 44 (3 H. VI.); B. 49 (25 H. VI.); B. 56 (1 H. VIII.). See Green, II. 202-17, for the whole subject of the guild merchant of Coventry.

⁴ The aldermen are first heard of in 1469. In the latter half of the century they are mentioned in connexion with the town

debt and the like at the fortnightly assemblies of the portmanmote. The mayor and five other notables, always including the master of the Trinity guild, were justices of the peace.¹ The same, with the exception of the recorder, kept the keys of the common treasure-chest. Twenty-four late officials, headed by the master of the guild, and frequently including the justices of the peace, brought together by some indirect process of which we have lost the secret,² elected the officers for the ensuing year. The same number, and to all intents and purposes the same men, with the guild-master as usual heading the list, were the jurats of the leet. A council of twenty-four, chosen by the mayor and doubtless identical with the jury of the leet, examined petitions four days before the two great assemblies of this court, in order, it seems, to discuss and decide on their rejection or acceptance by the jury of the leet. And the power of the magistrates was further increased by the formation of the mayor's council, a body of forty-eight of this officer's nominees, who, it would seem, were omnipotent during the latter part of the fifteenth century.

government and certain police duties were discharged by them in their respective wards. The office had, it appears, no connexion with the guilds, and was probably filled by late mayors.

¹ The mayor, recorder and four lawful men of the city are allowed to exercise all that appertains to the office of justice of the peace for labourers and artificers in the county of Warwick, *i.e.* fix the rate of wages (Charter 22 Rich. II., Burton MS. f. 253). For a trial of felons by the justices of the peace see Sharp, *Antiq.* 212.

² Although we have in the first *Leet Book* the record of some hundred and thirty elections of the city officers, there is no account of their methods of procedure on these occasions.

When once these men had put their hand to the plough there was no looking back,—no shirking of the responsibilities, which pressed on all who possessed a sum of worldly goods large enough to enable them to enter the ranks of the official class. Men of substance, and they only, were eligible for office, and the terms “degree of a mayor,” “degree of a bailiff,” used in assessing fines, show that there was some strictness maintained with regard to this property qualification. And indeed it was needful that mayors, bailiffs and the like should be moneyed men, for their responsibilities were great and the turns of fortune curious. They might, and probably did, add to their incomes while in office, in spite of the annual audit of accounts. On the other hand, should any source of revenue fail, they were compelled to make up the deficit, and hence were poorer men at the year’s end than at the beginning. Thus when the prior refused to pay the murage tax for twenty years the chamberlains, or treasurers, contributed the sum that was lacking from their own purses.¹ The same story is elsewhere to be met with; in 1276, when the receipts for paying the Lincoln ferm had fallen off, it was said that “they who have once been bailiffs of Lincoln can scarcely rise from poverty and misery.”² Still on the whole the magnates who possessed a stout heart and a keen eye, and were ready to cope with the numberless details of business

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 282. They were afterwards reimbursed when the suit was decided against the prior.

² Green, *Town Life*, II. 250.

with which an official's life in those days was fraught, preferred to acquiesce in their election rather than pay £100, 100 marks or £40 as a fine for refusing to fill the respective offices of mayor, sheriff or master of either guild. Once, indeed, a certain Roger a Lee declined to occupy the office of chamberlain, though he was a man well-to-do, having received £30 in money and plate with his wife, and must—so the prevailing opinion was—"have had right largely of his own, or else John Pachet would not have married his daughter to him." When solemnly adjured to "come in and exercise the said office," Roger persisted in his refusal, nor did the imposition of a fine of £20 avail to shake his resolution.¹

But having once accepted office with all its emoluments, risk and toil, a citizen was forthwith raised to a platform high above the mere "commoner," who had neither lot nor part in the rule of his city. He became one of the "men of worship," whom to insult was a dire offence;² and his doings must not be cavilled at, or explained to the vulgar herd. Gravity, decorum, and, above all things, secrecy³ marked the councils wherein he took part.

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 300.

² See Green, *Town Life*, II. 256, for examples of the punishments of those who insulted officials. In Coventry two men—John Smith and John Duddesbury—for their ill-behaviour to "men of worship" were in 1495 put under surety from session to session until their submission should content the justices of the peace (*Leet Book*, f. 276).

³ Eight of the mayor's council met every Wednesday. The sergeant kept the council-house doors so that no unauthorized person might enter, (*Ib.* ff. 251a, 277).

Seemliness of behaviour was demanded from him; a late mayor must live cleanly, the leet decreed, and not give way after warning to "avowtere and fornicacion, or osure," if he wished to rise higher as master of the Trinity guild, or continue to meet his brethren at the council board.¹ Distinguished on great occasions by his official dress, or may-be if he were "noted to be of the substance of £300," by the sumptuousness of his everyday apparel, the mayor, alderman, or sheriff, whether he rode in scarlet cloak in the procession at Midsummer eve or S. Peter's night, or, in his "fur of marten" and velvet, rubbed shoulders with the "lambswool"² doublet of the commonalty daily in the Cheaping or Broadgate, had great notions of the worth and dignity of his office. He was surrounded, even on ordinary occasions, by an atmosphere of form and ceremony, which no doubt had its effect on the outside world. When the mayor went to mass every morning at "seven of the clock" the sword-bearer and officers attended him. A like procession was formed on the way back, for though the underlings might go about their business during service, they were commanded to "hearken" the time of the mayor's coming out of church so as to be ready to accompany him homewards.³

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 269a. The mayor was to be deprived of his "cloke" (i.e. official rank) and council, of which body he was an *ex-officio* member.

² The sumptuary laws were directed against expensive dress. Those who were the noted possessors of £300 might indulge in marten or velvet doublets; and others worth £100 might wear fox or lambswool (*Ib.* f. 334).

³ *Ib.* f. 324.

So sensible were these worthy men of the dignity of their position, that questions of precedence were ever considered of great moment. Like Chaucer's "Wif of Bath," they were so wroth that they were "out of alle charitee" if another went before them on great occasions. When Harry Boteler, the recorder, fell into disgrace in 1434 by magnifying his office at the mayor's expense, the council thought it a due punishment that he should yield his place to the master of the Trinity guild, who thenceforth went by the mayor's side in all municipal processions,¹ an order they afterwards rescinded to gratify one of Boteler's successors; the mayor from that time walked alone, the master and recorder together.²

The labours of the town officials were greatly increased by the all-embracing character of the local legislation. The people of the Middle Ages believed devoutly in the efficacy of the law, and many matters concerning prices, wages, and the like, now known to regulate themselves according to supply and demand, were at times the subject of an infinite amount of often fruitless law-making. Nothing could check the zeal and energy of the local lawgivers; no subject was too difficult for them to grapple with, none beneath their consideration. The worshipful men might reverse the whole organization of the crafts connected with the iron industry at one leet sitting,³ or, on the other hand, turn their attention to the local supply of halfpenny pies, or the amount of wheat put by the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 254. The recorder was the legal adviser of the corporation. ² *Ib.* f. 316. ³ *Ib.* f. 89.

families of the two parishes into the holy cake.¹ No doubt it was impossible to enforce all these regulations. All the energy of the leet, or council, and the vigilance of the town officers often failed to do away with a long-standing abuse. It was forbidden under penalty of £10 to throw refuse into the Sherbourne; yet though "great diligence" was made to learn who the offenders were, it did not hinder the commission of the offence.² And although, according to the decrees of leet and council, people were compelled to be cleanly, honest and peaceable, I make no doubt that ducks³ and swine still appeared in the streets,⁴ baker's loaves fell short of the proper weight,⁵ and craftsmen bore arms in the city, and wounded each other in quarrel.⁶ In short, that many regulations were mere paper regulations to the end of the chapter.

The mayor and his colleagues had no light work before them on taking office. Numberless and varied details of municipal business went far to fill their days with employment. In addition to his judicial duties, a mayor examined, either in person or by deputy, a great part of the household stuff which came into the city to be sold. He must needs have some acquaintance with matters military, when a threat of invasion or civil war turned him into a captain, and the citizens under him into soldiers,

¹ *v. supra*, p. 82, n. 2. Perhaps the modern god-cake, given locally by sponsors to their god-children on Twelfth Night, is a relic of the holy cake of the fifteenth century. See Sharp, *Gloss. of Warw. Wds.* (ed. Halliwell Phillipps), *s.v.* God-cake.

² *Leet Book*, f. 239. ³ *Ib.* f. 3. ⁴ *Ib.* f. 2. ⁵ *Ib.* f. 1a. ⁶ *Ib.* f. 3.

such as they appeared at the half-yearly muster, each armed with such weapons as suited his degree.¹ While, in order to acquit himself with credit in the difficult and delicate relations wherein the citizens were frequently involved with the outside world of politics, a mediæval mayor must gather all the information he could upon affairs of state.

The bailiffs, with their work of court-holding, ferm-paying, and fine-collecting;² the chamberlains, who overlooked the common pastures, and put the murage money to its proper use;³ the wardens, who supervised town property and made payment of sundry expenses, delivering up their accounts for the annual audit, were all deeply immersed in business. And the keeping of these accounts was no easy matter, so great a variety of items was included therein, and so frequent were the demands upon the public purse. Now the wardens would be called upon to entertain and reward the bearward of a neighbouring nobleman, or the groups of strolling players who set up their booth in the inn-yard or market-place; or, again, to contribute to the maintenance of the knights of the shire,⁴ or lay down the ten pounds, which the mayor took as the "fee of the cloak";⁵ now to defray the cost of a civic

¹ Green, *Town Life*, I. 127.

² The bailiffs (sheriffs) by their oaths were compelled to "pay all ferms and fees in discharge of the mayor and community," and to be present on court days, sessions of the peace, etc., but were charged not to collect the fines levied until the justices of the peace had assessed them (*Leet Book*, f. 107a).

³ See the chamberlains' accounts (*Ib.* ff. 16a, 17).

⁴ *Ib.* f. 40a. Knight's fees to be paid by wardens, and not by chamberlains.

⁵ *Ibid.*

banquet, or that of the mayor's new fur cap, keeping in the latter case, the "olde stuffe" for the use of the town.¹ Surely, much of the activity of the House of Commons under Edward III. and the House of Lancaster is in the main due to the training many of its members received at home in the local guild-hall or council-house.

These town officials, it is true, did not always keep their hands clean from bribes during their year of office. No doubt they followed the custom of the times in this particular; indeed the practice of offering *douceurs* to sheriffs to procure their favour had become so common, that the amount to be given for this purpose was regulated by order of leet.² Nor were they required to discharge with absolute impartiality the duties belonging to their office. The sheriffs, "as ferr as they goodely may," the same ordinance continues, were required "to favor all maner persones of this cite" in making their returns, and in a "difficultious and chargeable execution" of any writ, "touching eny maner honest persone of this cite and fraunchises thereof" (*i.e.* one of the official class), to "councell with the mayor and his brethren afor they procede" to the business.³

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 201. If the cap cost more than 13s. 4d., the surplus was to be paid by the mayor.

² The sheriffs were enjoined to take but 40d. from one under a sheriff's degree; a noble (6s. 8d.) from one of a sheriff's rank; and 13s. 4d., "atte most" from one of a mayor's degree, under pain of a £10 fine.

³ *Ib.* f. 171a.

VIII

THE CORPORATION AND THE COMMONALTY

WE have seen how affairs in Coventry were entirely controlled by a few of the leading men of the place. But no display of authority, no firmness of discipline could entirely keep in check the spirit of restlessness and revolt called forth by the abuses which flourished under this irresponsible rule. The disturbances called forth by the victuallers' misdeeds, and the conversion of the Lammas lands in several holdings, fill the town annals during the later fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries. The law passed under Edward II.¹ forbidding victuallers to hold any municipal office was frequently evaded, and in many towns the great power of this class was a source of endless trouble.² Excitements in the guild-hall when the men, whose wages were fixed at statute rate, found they would not avail to buy them proper food, the

¹ Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* I. pt. II. 53. The act was repealed in 1511-12. In 1522 an order of leet was passed in Coventry to the effect that the mayor should warn any baker, who had offended twice against the assize, not to bake any more in the city unless he could find surety that his fault should not be repeated, and further, no victualler or butcher was allowed henceforth to be on the jury of leet (*Leet Book*, f. 335).

² For the abuses of the victuallers in Nottingham see *Nottingham Rec. passim*; at Manchester, Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* I. pt. II. 47.

shouting of angry crowds when the chamberlains at their Lammas ride refused to open gates to admit the free-men's sheep and cattle as they had done in times past, must have warned the mayor and his brethren to give heed to their ways. Murmurings were heard at an early date. In 1372 the customs laid on food for the purpose of raising money for murage provoked a rising. Three years after the townsfolk "cast their loaves at the mayor's head, because the bakers kept not the assize,"¹ neither did the mayor punish them according to his office." In 1388 the incident is repeated, and again and again we hear of risings owing to one or other of these fruitful cases of trouble, the abuses of the victuallers, or the enclosure of the common lands.²

Perhaps the townsmen were more sensitive with regard to the Lammas lands than on any other point. From time immemorial they possessed certain rights over the common and Lammas pastures which surrounded the city. On the former there was pasture for their cattle the whole year through, while, on the other hand, they merely shared with the various freeholders the use of the

¹ The loaf varied in weight, but not in price, with the price of corn (Green, II. 35).

² Harl. MS. 6,388 *passim*. It is difficult to determine the date of these risings, so great is the variation between the different lists of mayors; and so often do Coventry historians antedate events, owing to the confusion between the old and new styles. It is noticeable that the mayor in 1388 was Thomas Kele, one of the founders of the Trinity guild.

Lammas ground, driving their cattle upon it at certain seasons of the year, namely, from Lammas to Candlemas (August 1 to February 2);¹ during the remaining months the fields were in private hands. The extent of the common pastures was well known, but the peculiar tenure of the Lammas lands made it a more difficult matter to determine the exact area of pasture, held six months "in commonalty," and six "in severalty." From time to time angry disputes arose concerning the boundaries and extent of these lands, and a series of enclosures, whereof there was such bitter complaint in Warwickshire in the sixteenth century,² did much to diminish the broad belt of pasture which once engirt the city.

¹ Every freeman was allowed to drive so many cattle on the common grass or stubble from Lammas to Candlemas or (rarely) Lady Day. In the spring the land was closed by private persons for hay harvest or the sowing of corn. The number of cattle or "stint" allowed on the common lands was definitely fixed (Rogers, *Six Cent.* 90). In Coventry in the sixteenth century two geldings and one cow, or two cows and one gelding, was the stint allowed to each freeman (*Leet Book*, f. 406a). The custom of the "stint" obtains to this day; the freemen's cattle have all a certain mark, and there are still various fines levied on those who exceed the rate, as well as on the owners of stray cattle. Mr. Beard, the town clerk, told me of a case that happened only the other day (September 15, 1897). A bullock driven by a butcher along the road escaped across the common, and was seized on and impounded by the city pinner. The owner was fined, not, however, for exceeding his stint, but for allowing a bullock, which is a non-commonable animal, to be upon the pastures.

² Lamond, *Common Weal*, passim. A Commission of enclosures visited the counties of Oxford, Berks, Warwick, Leicester, Buckingham and Northampton in 1548 (*Ib.* xv.).

Various questions were, however, set at rest by a settlement in 1860, whereby half of the Lammas pasture was made over to the various freeholders who had half-yearly rights over them, and the remaining portion, held in trust for the freemen, was converted into common land for the whole year through.¹ To this day there still remain tracts of breezy and often gorse-grown common at Hearsall, Stivic-hall, Whitley, Stoke and Gosford Green. These and the small triangular patch, once known as Grey Friars' Green, form considerable relics of the freemen's pastures. Held, as the common report went, by the commonalty, "afore that any mayor or bailiff was,"² in other words before the incorporation of the city—these lands could not be alienated from the burghers' use without their consent.³ The pastures were, however, frequently enclosed, openly for municipal purposes, secretly for private gain. In the latter case there was naturally no word of consulting the burghers, and although in the former the community gave their consent to the measure, it was accompanied

¹ This was done in pursuance of the Enclosures Act, 1844. See Enclosures Award of Lammas and Michaelmas Lands, 1860.

² Corp. MS. F. 3. It is here said that the mayor, bailiffs, and commonalty "were seized in their demesne as of fee" of the common lands in right of the community. There was much uncertainty among the lawyers of that time as to the entity possessing rights over the common lands.

³ Cicely de Montalt, in her grant to the prior of the manorial "waste" attached to the Earl's-half, reserves for her tenants their reasonable rights of pasture (Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 2). Walter de Stoke bequeathed to his fellow-townsmen and their heirs for ever his rights of pasture (*Ibid.*).

by open and general disapproval on the part of the citizens.

The reason of this apparent contradiction lies in the fact that the men in power were faithful rather to the letter than the spirit of ancient custom. When it was necessary to consult the community on any matter touching the public property, the mayor was careful that those representing the whole body of townsfolk should be to a great extent members of the official class, or connexions of those in office. Hence these men, summoned from every ward at his requisition, did nothing but approve his policy.

This calling together of the community, a relic maybe of immemorial custom,¹ affording in its traces of ward² organization evidence of a form of government older and more popular than the system employed by

¹ Any business touching the public weal—such as the payment of a royal debt, granting away of town property and the like—could not be transacted without the official consent of the community. Thus in 1422, when the mayor summoned sixteen of the magnates to witness the sealing of deeds relating to town property, “it was perceived,” says the *Leet Book*, “by the mayor and all present that it would be expedient for the mayor to summon these following and many commons” (plures comones), i.e. men who had previously held no municipal office (*Leet Book*, f. 9).

² Those who were summoned for purposes of consultation came according to their wards. Thus in 1384 it was determined that the mayor should summon four or six citizens out of every ward, who should testify “tam pro seipsis quam pro tota communitate ville,” what the general will was concerning the enclosure of certain meadows by the Trinity guild (*Ib.* f. 6).

the town rulers in the fifteenth century, was absolutely useless for purposes of popular control. Unlike the men of Nottingham,¹ who once, when summoned to the common hall, "would in no wise agree" to the mayor's scheme for disposing of the common lands, the assembly of Coventry, thus tactfully managed, seems to have been compliant to official dictation. When in 1384² the mayor summoned four or six out of every ward to learn what the common wish was concerning the Podycroft and other common lands, which the Trinity guild kept in severalty in return for the annual ferm of £10 paid to the prior on behalf of the corporation, the assembly was in favour of the continuance of the old arrangement, though it was avowedly a most unpopular one. And no orders of leet availed to check the open discontent of the common folk, who certainly did not feel themselves in any way bound by this assembly. The guild constantly found that their fences were broken down, and their fields overrun by the people at Lammas; and in 1414³ it was thought necessary to decree that people trespassing (*delinquentes*) in the enclosures should be arrested, and imprisoned until they had made sufficient amends "by view of the guild master and six of the guild brethren." But the discontent of the commonalty did not abate, and once more in 1421 the officers in high place went through the form of consulting their fellow-townsmen. A hundred and thirty-four citizens, summoned at the mayor's requisition to S. Mary's Hall,

¹ Green, II. 343.² *Leet Book*, ff. 5a, 6.³ *Ib.* f. 6a.

gave the lie to popular discontent a second time, and approved of the giving over of the Mirefield, the Podycroft and Stivichall Hiron to the use of the guildsmen. But the anger of the townsfolk became so hot that in the following year they destroyed certain gardens at Cheylesmore, which, it appears, had been enclosed by well-known citizens, members of the mayor's council and justices of the peace.¹ A view and enregistration of the Lammas lands on all sides of the city, undertaken in that year by four juries specially appointed for the purpose, brought about a season of comparative peace; and the question of enclosures was allowed to slumber for nearly fifty years.

In the year 1422, no doubt with the notion of allaying the prevailing discontent, the idea of selecting a definite number of commoners from every ward, to form a council to watch over the interests of the commonweal, first took shape. There had been "dissentious stirrings," not only concerning enclosures, but also may-be with regard to the disposal of the money collected for murage, and possibly rumours were afloat concerning the convoking of a "general assembly," a thing the rulers of the men of Nottingham abhorred greatly.² There is little doubt that

¹ The commons destroyed Julius (? Giles) Allesley's gardens without the Grey Friar Gate (Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 16). Giles Allesley was mayor in 1426. Attilboro, a member of the mayor's council of twenty-four, who took part in the election of the mayor (*Leet Book*, f. 1), and Southam, a justice of the peace (*Ib.* f. 12a), had gardens which encroached on the common lands, for which they were allowed, when the survey was taken, to pay a composition (*Ib.* f. 15a).

² *Nottingham Rec.* III, 341-2.

at the Michaelmas leet there was some speech of giving those outside the corporation some means of checking the alleged malpractices of the municipal rulers. The mayor had been charged to call forty-eight commoners, "divers out of every ward," to hear *the chamberlain's accounts* for three years last past, and to witness any *grants made under the common seal*.¹ But there is little or nothing to tell of the activity of this body of commoners.² On the other hand, at the first opportunity the corporation turned this idea of a council into a weapon for their own defence by providing at the election of the mayor in the following January that there should be one consisting of the stanchest supporters of the town rulers. "It was provided," the *Leet Book* says, "that the said mayor should call and take to him the same twenty-four worthy men, that were of his election, with other twenty-four wise and discreet men, chosen to them and named by the said mayor," and that this company should "put in rule all manner of good ordinances" for the benefit of the city.³ And the worthy men

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 12. These grants were given to enable certain citizens to dispense with the ordinary regulations of leet; probably much favour and affection were shown in the granting of them.

² We cannot tell whether this council even met. In 1423 we hear that the chamberlains' accounts were audited in the presence of the mayor and "48 honest and legal men" elected by the aforesaid mayor to hear the accounts (*Ib.* f. 16a). Query, were these the commoners, or the mayor's council of Forty-eight? See below, p. 114.

³ *Ib.* f. 12a.

were determined that this good ordaining should be followed by prompt obedience.

"It is and hath been accustomed," says a later insertion in the records of leet, "that that the foresaid forty-eight persons ordaineth and establisheth for worship of the mayoralty, bailiffs and commonalty of this city, according to the law, all the whole body of the same city shall be bound thereby."¹ A certain latitude was allowed to the mayor as to whom summons should be sent "when he had need of forty-eight persons,"² save that he was always warned to require the attendance of "sufficient" *i.e.* well-to-do citizens. He was allowed also to add to the number, when it seemed good to him. Thus in 1445 "58 persons and moe of the most worthiest that were at home," came to debate upon the levying of a certain sum of money to meet the purchase of a new charter.³ And indeed the number varies with the occasion of summons. After 1446 we find that the presence of a quorum of twelve persons was sufficient for the transaction of business, the whole body afterwards giving their assent to the measures ordained by this smaller company.⁴ The rule of the Forty-eight gradually became a veritable tyranny. Even the official class rebelled against its dictates. We hear of a majority, "the most part" of the council, and this includes the idea of a dissentient minority. Those who transgressed the commands of this majority, if they had never filled the sheriff's post lost the freedom of the city; while

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 258a. ° *Ib.* f. 72a. ³ *Ib.* f. 123. ⁴ *Ib.* f. 129a.

late mayors or sheriffs lost their official rank. He shall "be exempt," the order ran ¹ in the sheriff's case, "from wearing scarlet among his company in all common assemblies, feasts, and processions"; and shall also be punished with fine and imprisonment at the mayor and council's discretion; on a late mayor the same penalty was laid, with the addition that he should be "utterly abject from the council"; while any citizens "comforting the disobedient" were to suffer the same penalties. When we learn that this order was framed in 1515 for the correction of John Strong, late mayor, and *ex-officio* member of the council, we may form some conception of the tyranny of this body, whose doings even divided the corporation against itself.

Deprived of any power of popular control they may have once possessed in the organized meetings of the wardsmen, there remained for those outside the ruling classes the privilege of presenting petitions filled with their grievances at the court leet; but it is unlikely that this custom gave them any real hold on the corporation; for the mayor and twenty-four councillors selected by him received and overlooked these petitions four days before the meeting of the court, "for the more speed," so it was alleged, upon the day of leet.² We may easily conceive the effect of this practice. Those petitions which were pleasing to the corporation would be accepted, and the rest rejected, either there and then, or set aside for open rejection by the court. Moreover,

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 316a.

² *Id.* f. 4.

when the corporation desired to make some change in the customs of the town, one of their number could "sue for remedy by act of leet" and, sure of a favourable hearing, present his bill of grievances to the mayor.¹ After the preliminary overlooking, petitions were presented "by oath" of the twenty-four jurats,² to the mayor and bailiffs at the assembly of the leet, and were accepted or rejected according to the jurats' verdict.

The few petitions which are preserved illustrate in some degree the impotence of those without the official class. When the smiths in 1426³ prayed that they might be released from providing a pageant at the Corpus Christi show, a task they had taken upon themselves some years back out of complaisance to one of the mayors, the worthy men of the leet "endorsed" the petition with words to the effect that the craft should still "occupy and provide the said pageant" every year under penalty of £10. On the other hand, when the master and brethren of the Trinity guild besought the "maire, ballyfs and chamburlens, et autres bonez gentez del enquest," that they might have their lands several, or be released from the payment which they made yearly

¹ See below, p. 117. The bill concerning the workers in iron.

² These were probably identical with the twenty-four inspectors. The leet jurats were elected, but it is not known by what process. There may have been a larger body outside the jurats who were nominally or actually consulted on these occasions. The phrase "the honest and legal men of the leet, and all other upon the leet being" is very puzzling. Petitions were said to be "endorsed" (*Leet Book*, f. 15a).

³ *Ibid.*

to the prior in the name of the community, it was ordered that the guild should occupy the lands in peace, keeping them several "all times of the year." And this order was in after years again repeated, although it gave rise to never-ending discontent;¹ while there is, it seems, little doubt that it was owing to the influence of the official class that a bill, framed for checking certain malpractices among the workers in iron, was drawn up in 1435.² This petition begins by a statement of the high pretensions the corporation entertained with regard to the control they exercised over the crafts. "It is necessary and needful," the bill runs, "to every governor of city and town to see such rule and governance may be had by the which the king's people may be truly ruled and demened," and great was the necessity "that certain ordinances of the crafts be taken good heed to," lest the "king's liege people" should suffer thereby. The petition then proceeds to treat of certain abuses prevalent among the workers in iron, and at the conclusion of the reading, the court laid down measures of reform.

We cannot tell—so meagre is our information concerning the presentment of offenders at the court leet—whether the men of Coventry used the court as an instrument for bringing their rulers to justice. They certainly did so at Nottingham. In 1511 a great struggle took place between the people and the ruling classes of that town. The mayor had leased out some of the common lands without, it seems, obtaining the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 6. A council of the wards, not the leet, gave this order.

² *Ib.* f. 89.

consent of the community, and at the next session of the court he was charged with the encroachment. In the following year another mayor was presented for sundry misdemeanours; he had, it was said, begun a muck-hill, misused the time of the common-sergeant, sold herrings that were unfit for food, not allowing his competitors, who would have sold eight for a penny as against his five, to appear in the market, "and upon this runneth a great slander in the country and a great complaint"; and, above all, he had failed to account for the spending of the common treasure.¹ In this manner did the good folk of Nottingham endeavour to check abuses which had hitherto flourished among them.

For a time success justified the stern rule of the merchants, and the city's wealth grew apace. Royal visits were frequently made the occasion of the purchase of new charters, and in 1445 the mayor, bailiffs, and community obtained the confirmation of their ancient liberties, with permission to amend all customs that were useless and defective for the benefit of the town.² This concession, characteristic of a time when there were endless tinkerings at municipal constitutions, made valid all past and future changes made by the oligarchy to strengthen their position.³ The visit of the Court in 1451 was fruitful of further privileges. "Whereas ye be now bailiffs," Henry VI. informed the mayor and his

¹ Green, II. 346.

² Corp. MS. B. 48; Merewether and Stephens, 881.

³ Such a change, for instance, as the formation of the council of Forty-eight.

brethren, "we will that ye be hereafter sheriffs;"¹ and by the charter thus graciously promised all connexion between the city and shire was severed. Coventry, with the surrounding hamlets, became a county of itself on the analogy of York and Norwich, and returned its own member to parliament, the citizens no longer taking any part in the election of the knights, who represented the county. The mayor also became the clerk of the market,² and steward and marshal of the king's household, the latter being a highly important privilege, as the king, together with the travelling officers of the Court jurisdiction, were so often quartered at Coventry³ during the civil war.

But times of hardship and misrule were again to overtake the citizens. Henry VI., on the occasion of this aforesaid memorable visit, though he praised the "good rule and demene" observed among them, let also fall a word of warning. "Moreover we charge you," he said, thinking maybe of the growing power of his enemies and the facilities they possessed by livery and maintenance for getting them adherents among the townsfolk, "that ye suffer no riots, conventicles, nor congregations of lewd people among you, and also that [ye] suffer

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 156a.

² This royal officer overlooked the local weights and measures, and compared them with the standard models.

³ The original of this charter is apparently not now at Coventry. See, however, Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 142; Merewether and Stephens, 881-3. Norwich had been made into a county in 1403 (Green, I. 245).

no lords' liveries, knights nor squires to be received of no man within you, for it is against our statutes."¹ Within the next few years, however, the evils Henry had spoken of came to pass. It is true that it was probably not for political purposes, but rather for protection against their immediate rulers, that the discontented commons and craftsmen appealed to "lords, knights, and squires," without the city. And the yet more serious features of misrule, "conventicles and congregations of lewd folk," which became notable in their turn, were called forth rather by the enclosure of certain tracts of common pasture than the reverse or success of either Lancaster or York.

We see the beginnings of the evil during the next few years. The political position of Coventry, its prominence among the Lancastrian strongholds of the kingdom, possible divisions among its citizens as followers of York or Lancaster, the frequent visits of the Court involving a constant drain of money to provide presents and pageants for the queen and courtiers, all tended to throw the municipal finances into confusion. Officials became slack in the performance of their duty, or unduly greedy of gain, and the commonalty were eager to take advantage of the general confusion. The leet of 1456 was full of complaint.² The chamberlains, wardens, and guild-masters, one petition declared, omitted to give in their accounts; the sub-bailiffs made undue return of writs; while the gaolers, possibly for a "consideration," re-

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 156a.

² *Ib.* ff. 171, 171a.

leased from prison men who had been condemned in the courts of the city. In this and the next year we hear from the same source of the misdeeds of the bailiffs. They collected—probably for their own profit—the fines of offenders before these had been assessed by the justices of the peace,¹ and, making the citizens' necessity their opportunity, took "excess" fines from those outlaws and offenders, who besought their favour.² At this season those who thought justice was denied them at the city courts appealed for aid to the outside world. "Diuers of the inhabitants of this cite," begins a measure of leet passed in 1456,³ "beying of froward disposicions, dailly begynnen to gete them mayntenaunce of myghty men of straunge shires, and be their supportacion sewen ful unconciensly diuers of their neyghbors, in this cite dwelling, in forreyn shires⁴ be diuers forreyn, feyned and untrue accions to gret sclaunder of theymself and all this cite, and to ther proper grete enpouerysshynge, and gret hurte of ther seid neyghbours." It was therefore ordained that any offender should be "discomyned" out of the city (*i.e.* lose his freedom), and "be estraunged from his crafte that he vseth her, and of all maner gildes and bretherhedes of this cite, and be reputed and holden as

¹ It is possible of course that the method of assessing fines by the justices of peace was a device of the oligarchy to prevent the fines arising from leet presentments from pressing too heavily upon the governing ranks.

² Possibly as a means of getting the bailiffs to restore confiscated goods and the like. (*Leet Book*, f. 171a.)

³ *Ib.* f. 171a.

⁴ *i.e.* courts of the shire.

straunge from eny benyvolence of this cite as eny other estraunger, never admytted in this cite; and ouer this to forfet C marcs¹ at every defalt," half to the mayor and half to the chamberlains.

Probably it is from this time that we must date the backwardness of the city in paying their ferm to the exchequer; and though the vigorous measures of the leet may have kept temporary order for those within and without the ruling body, yet the embarrassments of the corporation were not past. An attack on the franchises,² made, so it would appear from some words the steward of Cheylesmore let fall, at the instigation of some of the malcontents within the city in 1464, was the cause of much trouble and fear to the townsfolk. The arrest of one Hikman, a dyer, a craft always at daggers drawn with the corporation, in Cheylesmore Park, was the occasion of the trouble. At the instance of the officials of the royal manor,³ Edward IV. called in question the right of the city officers to make arrests within the manorial territory. But in this strait the worshipful men took courage, and ordered the recorder, a man of fearless bearing, with two others of the chief citizens, to ride forthwith to Northampton, where the Court then was, and beg an audience of the king. And these emissaries ventured to maintain the city's liberties to

¹ 100 marks.

² *Leet Book*, f. 196a.

³ They declared that Cheylesmore was "seyntwary," *i.e.* sanctuary. On the evils of rival jurisdictions, and the consequent escape of offenders fleeing from town justice, see Green, I. 311.

the king's face even at the risk of incurring the royal displeasure.

When Boteler, the recorder, had read the charters given "of olde time" to Coventry, showing how the municipal body had uninterruptedly enjoyed the right of making arrests in the park, although "the kyng or his household have ben then present in the seid place of Cheylesmore," the King and his lords, among whom were the King-maker and Tiptoft, earl of Worcester, " marvelled " that the Cheylesmore officials should assert their claims against those of the corporation. But when Edward promised, "in brief time," to come and settle the matter at Coventry, requiring meanwhile that the man whose arrest had proved the source of the quarrel should be restored to the park, whence he had been taken by the constables, the men of Coventry demurred, pleading that if the prisoner were set at liberty the city officers would be held responsible by the party who had brought the action against him. The king asked Danby, the chief justice, whether this was true, and the justice had the honesty to inform his master that the citizens had the law on their side. Edward then hastily dismissed the Coventry men, though we are not told if he laid any commands on them concerning the prisoner's release. When the matter was tried at Coventry, before the justices Markham and Danby and the earl of Worcester, and again in the Tower of London, the steward of Cheylesmore could produce no satisfactory evidence against the claims of the Coventry men, though he owned he was acting on the advice of certain worshipful folk in the city; but, as the

Leet Book says, he guardedly "would in no wise name any person." Then "the forseid recordor besought the kynges good grace to remembur the long sute made for his seyde cite in that behalf, and no thing shewed azeyns theyre entent therin. So that be likelehood the compleynt made upon the officers of the seid cite" by the Cheylesmore officers "was supposed to be made only of wyfulness, besechyng his hyghnes that his mair and officers of the seid cite might kepe and enjoy sich liberties and fraunchisis as they . . . used in the time of his progenitors, remembryng his same hyghnes that the seyde cite ever had be redy, and was, to plesse his hyghnes at alle tyme." Whereupon the king was graciously pleased to allow the city to continue to enjoy the same liberties as before.¹

There were further signs in the year 1464, that all was not peace within the city of Coventry. This time, a "mighty man," though not of a "straunge shire," namely the Kingmaker, whose name was all powerful in the Midlands, figures also in the municipal strife. A quarrel arose between a certain William Bedon and William Huet² about a debt—it may have been a party affair between the weavers and tailors—and appeal was made to Edward IV. The matter, the king declared, was "screpulus and doubtfull," and directed that the litigants should abide by the arbitration of certain citizens, or that the mayor, in the event of their in-

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 198a

² *Ibid.*

ability to decide upon the case before Michaelmas, should step in and dispose of the matter.

Accordingly at the appointed time, when the arbitrators failed to agree, the mayor took the matter into his own hands, and decreed that Huet should ask Bedon's forgiveness for his behaviour towards him, giving also 40s. "for amends." "Which laude and decree," the *Leet Book* says, "the seid William Huet yn neyther braunche wold not obey, but utterly refusyd," using "right vnfytyng, inordinate and seducious langage sownyng to the derogacion of the kynges lawes and of his peace, yn right evyll example, for the which the seid mair, vmper,¹ be the advyse of his seid brethern, comyttid hym to warde," the king giving him "right good and special thank" for his action in this behalf. Tiptoft, it appears, who was then in the city, kept Edward informed of the progress of the business. But the affair soon assumed serious proportions, and the king wrote to inform the mayor that if any others vexed their neighbours by any "imaginacions, sclaundours or feyned accusacions hereafter, or made any . . . conventicles," they were to be repressed; the officer requiring all the king's liege men in the city to aid him in the work "at thair peril."²

But peace was not to be restored by these means, for the city authorities had still to reckon with Huet, who lay in prison. By the "meane of his frendes," the account goes on, he "labored vnto my lord of Warrewyk

¹ i.e. umpire.

² *Leet Book*, f. 199.

for favior and ease to be had yn the seid decree at my lordes instaunce, so that to ouer grete rebuke ne charge were not don to the seid William yn makyng therof. And theruppon the seid mair, allethough after his dimeretys, well and indifferently be hym vnderstonden, he were worthy to have made as lowly submission as cowde be thought therefore, and to have boron to the vtmost of his godes be sides that, and rightwesnes without mercy shold have ben don therin; but at the seid instaunce leying rightwesnes apart and folowyng mercy," the mayor "made his laude and decree thus: that the seid William Huet shuld be of good seying and behavyng fro that tyme fourth, and that he shuld yeve the seid William Bedon X marcs in amendes toward his costes. And so he did, which amountid not to the thryd peny that he had made hym to spende; and yette further at my seid lordes instaunce"—here the mayor, sadly confused and harassed by the divergence of the paths of "mercy" and "righteousness," takes up the account in his own person—"my worshipfull brethern and I so effectuelly entreted the seid William Bedon, that he yave the seid William Huet agayn V nobles of the seid X marcs." Then Huet, being further bound over to keep the peace, was "set at his large," or released.

Owing to these repeated attacks, as well as to the unsettled state of the kingdom, things had not prospered with the Coventry corporation. In 1468 they were £800 in arrears of their annual ferm of £50. The sheriff was ordered to seize the goods of the mayor and men of the place as distress. He could find no more than 106s.

worth of goods, and these "remained on his hands for lack of buyers," "and since the said mayor and men had no other goods or lands within the bailiwick that could be taken into the king's hands, no further payment was then made,"¹ a rather amusing betrayal of the helplessness of the central government. But the Trinity and Corpus Christi guilds were bodies possessed of great wealth, though upon their funds the exchequer had no claim, thanks to the astuteness of the corporation in thus disposing of its possessions. But no doubt the resources both of guilds and townsmen were failing, even as those of the monastery, for in 1466 the prior was £550 in arrears to the Crown for the rent of the Earl's-half; his tenants in the city must therefore have been backward in paying the rent due to the priory treasury. And to add to the general confusion in 1469 the commonalty rose crying that they were defrauded of their lawful share of the Lammas lands. More serious than all, when civil war again broke loose and Edward and Warwick measured swords together, the men of Coventry chose the losing side, nor did a too late repentance avail to save them from the terrible humiliation of a temporary forfeiture of their franchises.

¹ Madox, *Firma Burgi*, 217; Green, *Town Life*, II. 216.

IX

COVENTRY AND THE KINGDOM OF ENGLAND

So far was Coventry from the great centres of the national life, that there is little to connect the place in the earlier part of its history with the history of the kingdom. Now and then, it is true, a great stranger coming from London with his face set towards Chester and the parts of the west, might travel through the little town, but his coming scarcely affected the lives of the inhabitants. Occasionally they were visited by a very important personage, and bestirred themselves to get suitable lodging, food, and conveyances for the immense retinue wherewith the lord king travelled in those days. But the monarchs at first troubled the city little. It was too far from the royal manors where good hunting was, like Marlborough, Clarendon or Woodstock, to be an attractive or convenient place of sojourn even for such restless spirits as Henry II. or John. William I. may have passed through the town on his way from Warwick to Nottingham on one of his journeys to crush the rebellious Saxons, and Stephen, as we have seen, swept down on the castle—that famous “castlelet or pile”¹ in Earl Street—and razed it to the

¹ This castle, afterwards rebuilt, fell into decay, and was

ground. Henry III. probably paid the inhabitants a longer visit. During the siege of Kenilworth, which lasted from Midsummer to December 1266, the neighbourhood was the centre of military operations, but when the castle containing the remnant of De Montfort's following surrendered, the smouldering fires of civil war died away. But of all these events the local documents tell us nothing. In spite of the stirring scenes enacted at Kenilworth, scarce five miles away, we do not know whether the folk of the town took part with De Montfort or with the king.

The city has no associations with Edward I., but his son, who had strong partisans among the convent folk, appointed a levy to meet him at Coventry on February 28, 1322, before he went to fight with and defeat Lancaster at Boroughbridge.¹ In spite of her close connection with the place, Isabella never, it appears, visited her tenants there. But her ears were always open to the complaints of the hard usage they received at the prior's hands, and messengers doubtless often travelled between Coventry and Castle Rising in Norfolk, to bear news to the queen of her enemy's undoing. She also took the Grey Friars, who had become famous for their sanctity, under her protection, and a letter from her, written at their request, begging that there

let out into tenements. Cheylesmore, where the De Mohauts lived, had originally been a nursery for the earl of Chester's children (Stowe in Harl. MS. 539 No. 4; see also Corp. MS. C. 61). ¹ Stubbs, *Const. Hist.* II. 49.

might be no interference with their privileges of burial, is still extant.¹ At that time many bodies of great folk, who "as Franciscans thought to pass disguised," were buried clothed in the habit of the order in the Grey Friars' chapel, bringing no small profit to that famous house. No doubt the queen's protection of their rivals was another drop in the monks' cup of bitterness.

After Cheylesmore and the Earl's-half became a royal manor, kings and princes very frequently visited the city; for as Coventry had by this time become an important place—already accounted the fifth city in the kingdom—its wealth was an attraction to needy kings, who desired to be on good terms with burghers who were becoming a power in the land. In 1397 Coventry witnessed the preparations for the duel between Henry Bolingbroke and Mowbray, duke of Norfolk. The splendour of royal and knightly accoutrements at this meeting must have dazzled the sober townsfolk, and perhaps they shared in the bewilderment of the Court at the strange vacillation of the king, who, when all preparations were made, forbade the duel to take place. Of the whole scene, however, the local chroniclers tell us nothing. It is to Holinshed² that we look for the description of that "sumptuous theater" wherein the lists were made ready for the combat; and wherein too, after the combat had been stayed, the two adversaries sat two long hours waiting until the king's pleasure

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 179; Vol. of Correspondence, Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 1. ² Holinshed, III. 494.

should be known. When sentence of banishment was pronounced and leave-takings over, "the duke of Norfolk departed sorrowfullie into Almanie, and at the last came to Venice, where he for thought and melancholie deceased"; for Harry Bolingbroke, however, whose sentence was not like his adversary's, for life, but for ten years, many active days remained. Gosford Green, where this scene was enacted, is still a green, and as yet unbuilt on. The ruins of Calaudon Castle, where Mowbray, duke of Norfolk, passed the night before the meditated encounter with Bolingbroke, are still visible from the highway leading from Stoke to Leicester, but all trace of Baginton Castle, where his adversary slept, have since disappeared. Richard was lodged in a tower belonging to Sir William Bagot, about a quarter of a mile without the town. Sir William, who with Bushy and Greene acquired such unenviable notoriety as creatures of Richard II., lies buried in Baginton church, where a monumental brass of rare workmanship, now placed immediately under the rafters of the chancel roof, once marked the place where he was laid.

The coming down of the king and Court to Coventry must have created a sore disturbance. Such a host always travelled with their royal master, and so numerous were the exactions of the purveyors. These officers requisitioned anything of which they stood in need for the king's service—carts and horses, hay and oats, food and wine. For all these they were compelled by statute to pay full market price, but frequently they did no

more than give a tally, and merely promised payment.¹ We have in Northampton a sorry picture of the havoc these exactions wrought. When Henry III. died, he owed £400 to the community of this town, because his purveyors had taken goods to that value during the last twenty years of his reign in the fairs of Northampton, Stamford, S. Ives, Boston, Winchester, and S. Edmund's. He also owed £100 to the drapers of the first-named town for cloth. And many of the townsfolk, runs the bitter complaint, had abandoned their homes through poverty, and were dying of hunger or begging their bread.² A hundred years later the condition of the people was still desperate. They murmured at these exactions, but secretly, for, as they tell us in a popular poem of the day:—

“We moste speke faire for drede.”

The hated purveyors still come—

“To haue whete and otys at the kyngis nede :
And over that befe and Mutton,
And butter and pulleyn [poultry], so God me spede !
And our payment shalbe a styk of A bough.”³

Truly villagers and townsfolk were in terror of the king's coming.

The royal retinue was preceded by twenty-four archers, and consisted of nobles, courtiers, officers of

¹ See, for instance, Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Pass. IV. 57-8 ed. Skeat, Clarendon Press), 38. A tally was a rod of hazel (one of a pair that tallied), with notches on it to indicate the amount owed. ² Pollock and Maitland, *Hist. Law*, I. 666.

³ i.e. tally. See *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* (ed. Skeat), 70.

the household, ministers of justice, parties in lawsuits, and a herd of adventurers and adventuresses of the lowest class. Some rode, others drove in heavy springless chariots, beautifully ornamented, but slow and inconvenient.¹ A court of justice accompanied the king wherever he went, for the steward and marshal of the household had jurisdiction, superseding other authority of shire or borough, over an area of twelve miles to be counted from the king's lodging.² Before setting forth the steward gave notice to the sheriff of the place wherein the king proposed to sojourn, so that prisoners might be brought thither for trial at the household officers' court. The king himself, when he came to Coventry, was usually quartered at the priory, the princes of Wales occasionally at the earl of Chester's palace at Cheylesmore, but the vast retinue found shelter within the town. At the command of the marshal the doors of the principal folk of the place were marked with chalk, and the dwellers there found they had to accommodate some member of the royal party. Once indeed a queen and her ladies took up their abode for one night at the house of a simple burgher. Margaret of Anjou, who came to see the famous Mystery Plays in 1457, was lodged at the house of "Richard Wode, the grocer, where Richard

¹ See illustration in Jusserand, *Wayfaring Life*, 96.

² Green, I. 209. This mode of administering of justice became much disliked. When towns were rich and powerful enough, it was customary to make the mayor steward and marshal of the household. Coventry obtained this privilege in 1451.

Sharpe some time dwelled," and ate a gorgeous supper there of the mayor's providing, consisting among other things of "orynges, counfetys, and gynger." The men of London early acquired certain privileges with regard to the housing of the court. Counsel had to be taken with the mayor before this wholesale billeting began; and when Edward II.'s marshal once neglected this preliminary measure, a citizen, who found a royal secretary quartered on his household, forthwith turned this unlooked-for visitor out into the street.¹

Other notable travellers came in these three centuries to Coventry, but secretly, for they wished to escape pursuit. Many evil-doers claimed the protection of the Church in those days, and when any fugitive laid hold on the knocker of the church door, he was safe from pursuit.² On entering the sanctuary, he made confession of his crime, and, if he left of his own free will, he must abjure the kingdom, and make straight for some port appointed him by the coroner, there to take ship for foreign lands. Many criminals on quitting the sanctuary found their enemies lying in wait, and perished, although they held the cross, symbol of the Church's protection, in their hand. Men feared to incur the penalty of excommunication, which the violation of sanctuary always brought, by dragging Faulkes de Breauté from Coventry church; and this Norman adventurer, whom

¹ Riley, *Liber Albus*, 303-5.

² On the rights of sanctuary and its privileges, see Jusserand, 152 *sqq.* A knocker of this kind remains in the church of Solihull, Warwickshire.

the favour of John and Henry III. had raised to riches and greatness until he was "plusquam rex in Anglia"—of more account than the king—put himself under the bishop's protection, and travelled in his company to Bedford to throw himself on the king's mercy. He was banished the kingdom. With him fell, in 1222, the foreign party under Peter des Roches, who for so many years had thwarted the designs of Henry's great minister, Hubert de Burgh.¹

At the time of the Peasant Revolt in 1381 John Ball was taken in hiding within the city, where he had possibly a home or relatives. The commonalty of the city had, may-be, given ear to his doctrines of equality and communism in former days, for there was at that time great suffering and discontent among the poorer folk. The artizans were oppressed not by their lord—as the men of S. Alban's or Bury S. Edmund's—but by their own fellow-townsfolk, the rich merchants, who held high office in the corporation. Year after year there comes the same complaint. This or that mayor enclosed the common pasture lands, so that the people had not sufficient grass for their cattle, or refused to punish his brethren and allies the victuallers, who broke the assize of bread, so that the people were cheated of the barest necessities of life. The enraged artizans, who "cast loaves at the mayor's head because the bakers kept not the assize, neither did the mayor punish them according to his office," would no doubt listen gladly to the dis-

¹ *Dict. Nat. Biography*, s.v. Breauté.

courses of this old-time socialist. "O ye good people," he would say to the assembled multitude, "the maters gothe nat well to passe in Englande, nor shall nat do tyll every thyng be common. . . . We be all come fro one father and one mother, Adam and Eve. Werby can they [the gentlemen] say or shewe that they be gretter lordes than we be? . . . They dwell in fayre houses, and we have the payne and traueyle, raine and wynde in the felds; and by that that cometh of our labours they kepe and maynteyne their estates. . . . Thus Jehan [Ball] said . . . and the people . . . wolde murmure one with another in the feldes and in the wayes as they went togyder, affermyng howe Jehan Ball sayd trouthe."¹ Change a word here and there, substitute "merchant" for "gentleman," and "in the workshops" for "in the fields," and you have a discourse which would have greatly enraged the men of Coventry at the time of the Peasant Revolt.

The murmur about another name, greater than that of John Ball, had also reached the citizens. Lutterworth is scarcely fifteen miles distant from Coventry, and if we may judge by the tale of subsequent troubles and persecutions, there were many followers of Wickliffe within the city.²

It is fitting that in a city so unorthodox the first

¹ Berners, Froissart's *Chron.* quoted in Jusserand, 285.

² Warwickshire may have been a county addicted to Lollardy. John Lacy, vicar of Chesterton, near Warwick, was charged with receiving and harbouring the famous Oldcastle, Lord Cobham (Onslow and Smith, *Diocesan Hist. Worcester*, 103).

attack should be made on the vast possessions of the Church. At the summoning of the "unlearned parliament" in 1404 a special precept was given to the sheriffs to prevent the return of those skilled in the law as members of parliament, and Coventry, remote as it was from the law-courts at Westminster, was a happy spot to choose for such an assembly. The respect the clergy had once commanded was now withheld from them by reason of the dissolute lives so many led, and their greed of wealth, whereto we find such abundant allusion in Langland and Chaucer; and the proposal to appropriate the wealth of the church to secular ends was well liked by the knights of the shire. Archbishop Arundel pleaded in response to this attack that the clergy gave tenths and the laity only fifteenths towards the king's necessities; moreover, the Church was not wanting day nor night in rendering the king service by masses and prayers to implore God's blessing upon him. Whereat Sir John Cheyne, the speaker of the Commons, with a stern countenance, said "that he valued not the prayers of the Church." But it was early days for such words as these. "It might easily be seen what would become of the kingdom," was the severe reply, "when devout addresses to God, wherewith His Divine Majesty was pleased, were set so light by." The work of Henry VIII. was not to be anticipated, and the knights desisted from the attempt at the threat of excommunication.¹

¹ Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 142. The only reference to Coventry in the business of this parliament is a petition from the convent

The town was witness at this time of an example of the lack of reverence for the mysteries of religion displayed by the people who were about the person of the king. Dysentery was very prevalent at Coventry during the session of parliament, and one day the archbishop of Canterbury encountered a procession bearing the Host through the streets to some sick man's bedside.¹ The archbishop bent his knee, but the king's knights and esquires, not interrupting their conversation, turned their backs upon the Sacrament. The ecclesiastic was filled with holy indignation at such irreverence. "Never before was the like abomination beheld among Christian men," he cried, and went to complain of the offenders to the king. Henry was at first loth to punish his followers, but he was finally moved to do so by the prelate's eloquence, for the House of Lancaster in its weakness had allied itself with the Church, and looking to that body for support, the king was careful not to alienate so powerful a friend as the archbishop of Canterbury.

The Lancastrian kings were, however, better known in the city as borrowers than as champions of the orthodox faith. Royal folk at that time, in spite of their great array and state, were often at a loss for ready money, and the treasury of Henry IV. was notoriously an empty one. Henry V. too, wanting money to prosecute his wars, in the third year of his reign borrowed 200 marks from the mayor and community, leaving in pledge "his

against the men of Coventry, who injured the conduit built by the people of the priory (Corp. MS. B. 34).

¹ Trokelowe and Blaneforde, *Chron. S. Albani* (ed. Riley), 394.

great collar, called Ikelton collar,"¹ garnished with 4 rubies, 4 great sapphires, 32 great pearls, and 53 other pearls of a lesser sort, weighing $36\frac{3}{4}$ oz., and then valued at £500. When the king or any great noble desired to borrow, and the citizens were willing to lend, collectors were appointed by the corporation to go through each ward and take from every man his contribution towards the loan. Each citizen paid, according to his ability, a sum varying from 13s. 4d., taken from the most substantial people, to a penny from those of the poorest class.² The extent of every one's property, was more or less accurately gauged on these occasions, and was a matter of common knowledge. Where there was so little privacy in life and such frequent assessments, neither wealth nor poverty could well be hid.

Henry V. seems to have been much beloved in Coventry, if we may judge by the hearty welcome given to him on his coming thither on March 21, 1421. The mayor and council ordered that £100 and a gold cup worth £10 should be presented to the king, and the same to the queen "in suo adventu a Francia in Coventre," for those times a truly magnificent gift.³ As prince of Wales Henry had often visited the place,⁴ and kept his court at Cheylesmore Palace. He was a discreet youth, history says, much employed in the Welsh wars, and the tale of his wild doings there, which Shakespeare has

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 20. *Issue Roll of Exchequer*, H. III.-VI., 402.

² *Leet Book*, *passim*. ³ *Leet Book*, f. 6a.

⁴ He was there in 1411 (*Corp. MS. B. 37*).

localised at the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap, rests, we are told, on the untrustworthy basis of Elizabethan tradition.¹ But legend and tradition die hard, and for most of us a pleasant picture² arises to the mind at the mention of prince Hal's connexion with Coventry. It is a long road leading from London to the city. A hoary-headed, full-bodied man, with a right boastful carriage, rides along followed by a handful of recruits, the rag-tag and bob-tail of a regiment, with scarce a whole body, weapon, or shirt among them. And two persons ride over the hill to meet them, one a courtier-like cavalier, and the other a slim youth with laughter in his eyes. And the youth throws back his head and laughs, and calls the fat man, "blown Jack," and "quilt," and other opprobrious names. But he laughs back, calling the other "mad wag," and asking him "what the devil" he does "in Warwickshire." For all soldiers were at Shrewsbury by that time and ready for the fight. But this pleasant scene has no claims to be authentic history.

Troubles connected with religion soon came upon Coventry. In 1424 the preaching of a hermit attracted a great audience in the Little Park during five days' space. The preacher, one Grace, who had been first a monk, then a friar, and lastly a recluse, disarmed suspicion by announcing that he had been licensed to preach by the bishop's ministers of the diocese. At last, how-

¹ Church, *Henry V.* In the mayor-lists it is said that John Hornby, mayor in 1411, arrested the prince in the priory (Harl. MS. 6,388 f. 15). May-be Shakespeare heard some local tradition of a freak of the prince. ² Shakespeare, 1 *Hen. IV.* iv. 2.

ever, a report spread that he was not "licenciate," "and grett seying was a mong the people that the priour and frer Bredon would have cursed all tho' that herden the said John Grace preche." This rumour of the intention of the two most influential churchmen in the city—the head of S. Mary's convent, and the best-known member of the community of Grey Friars—greatly moved the townsfolk, and the two ecclesiastics above-named, fearful lest harm should befall them, refused to leave Trinity church, whither they had repaired for evensong, until the mayor should come to appease the multitude. "Notwythstandyng they might have goone well inowghe whethur thei wold," the *Leet Book* says, with a touch of contempt. And thus it was that a report went about in the country "that the comens of Coventre wer rysen, and wold have distroyd the priour and the seid frer," which report unhappily spread to the ears of those that were about the king. The next year the earl of Warwick and a special commission of justices were sent down from Westminster to inquire into this movement within the city.¹ For some time the franchises were in danger of confiscation; but after the citizens had borne great charges, upwards of £80 for "counsel" and other costs, their peace with the ruling powers was made.

It is natural to infer that this disturbance, which the city authorities treated as so trifling, but which appeared to the powers at Westminster a highly serious matter,

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 205; *Leet Book*, f. 24.

was connected with Lollard preaching. It seems that this obscure sect was never wholly crushed, but lingered on in certain districts probably throughout the fifteenth century. Leicestershire, in Wickliffe's time, had been a perfect hot-bed of heresy. "There was not a man or woman in that county," it has been said, "save priests and nuns, who did not at that time openly profess their disbelief in the doctrines of the Church, and their approval of the new views of the Lollards."¹ The contagion soon spread to Warwickshire. No doubt persecution did its work in many parts. The open profession of Lollardism was highly dangerous in the fifteenth century, and the cause counted many martyrs. The Coventry men were, most likely, implicated in the obscure rising under Jack Sharpe in 1431; at least arrests were made in their neighbourhood.² These offenders, whose scheme for the disendowment of the Church was both behind and in advance of those times, were shown no mercy, but suffered the penalty of treason. The bishops of Coventry, at a later date, made the city the theatre of their persecutions. In 1485 Foxe records that various people of Coventry were "troubled for religion," and compelled to recant, though not without injunction to penance.³ The annals tell us they bore faggots about the city on the market day, the dread of fire being no doubt more convincing to the suspected heretics than the bishop's logic. But in the next generation both men and women had

¹ Thompson, *Hist. Leicester* (pocket ed.), 78.

² *Proceedings Privy Council*, IV. 89. Ramsay, *Lanc. and York*, I. 437.

³ Foxe, *Martyrs* (1823), XXXIX.

strength to endure to the end. In 1511 bishop Blythe held a "Court of Heresy" at Maxstoke, but the accused saved themselves by abjuration, and went through the form of bearing faggots throughout the city. All were not thus to be delivered, however, and the next year one Mrs. Joan Ward, who had performed this penance, confessed her disbelief in transubstantiation, and her want of faith in the efficacy of image-worship and pilgrimages, and was handed over to the secular arm to be burned. Seven suffered in the Little Park at Coventry this year (1512), say the city annals; but one, who was not staunch enough for martyrdom, recanted, and did penance "on a pipe head," holding a faggot on his shoulder while his comrades were burning.¹

Echoes, first of the great doings of Englishmen in the French wars, and then of the reverses which befell them, reach us from time to time, chiefly in the form of requests to relieve the royal poverty. And the chief folk of the town frequently travelled to London in order to procure sureties for repayment of money lent to the king or other members of the royal house. Thus when the earl of Warwick in 1423 wrote to beg the citizens to relieve the necessities of the child-king Henry, "now in his tender age and greatest need," informing them, as an incentive to their liberality, that the townsmen of Bristol had "notably and kindly acquit them" in these matters,

¹ Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 28. In 1520 six more were burnt; their heresy was "because they would not obey the pope" (!) (*Ib.* f. 29). The next year one Robert Sikerly was taken and burnt for not believing in transubstantiation (*Ibid.*).

the citizens lent £100 willingly enough. But with the prudence which distinguished their everyday doings, they sent John Leder, late mayor, to London to negotiate for pledges for future repayment,¹ which sureties, we are told, "might not be gotten without great labour."² Richard Joy and Laurence Cook³ undertook a like errand the same year, for the protector Gloucester, the husband of Jacoba of Hainault, who proposed—so he informed the citizens—"to pass over the sea with God's might in his own person, for to relieve . . . his lands and lordships," begged the good folk of Coventry to ease him in his undertaking with £200 "upon sufficient surety." Whether the good folk believed that the expedition to Flanders would turn to "right great ease of the people, and especially of the merchants of this realm," as the duke boasted, we cannot tell; but they sent him 100 marks, insisting nevertheless upon obtaining the security he had been so ready to offer. They gave, however, "with all their good hearts" to those more worthy of respect than Gloucester; and when Talbot was a prisoner in the hands of the French, they sent 23 marks towards his ransom.⁴ To the king's later applications for a loan, they usually gave a favourable answer. In 1431 Laurence Cook bore to London £100, lent for the prosecution of

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 22-3.

² *Ib.* f. 23.

³ *Ibid.* The surety for the loan "might not be gotten without great cost," and the different emissaries of the citizens spent, one 40s., one 13s. 4d., and one £6 1s. 10½d. in journeys to London, Boston, and Sandwich about this business (*Ib.* f. 24).

⁴ *Ib.* f. 48a.

the war, "and many lords, spiritual and temporal," the *Leet Book* says, "that is to say, the cardinal bishop of Winchester, the bishop of Bath, the bishop of Ely, the bishop of Rochester, lords spiritual, the duke of York, the duke of Norfolk, the earl of Warwick, the earl of Stafford . . . with other reverent barons and bachelors . . . took the water at Dover, and rivedon (arrived) thro' God's grace at Calais, and so comen to the city of Roan (Rouen) by the land of Picardy." ¹

Four years later the government was forced yet again to have recourse to borrowing, and on the occasion of the congress at Arras the same sum was collected to relieve the king's necessities "by way of lone" throughout the wards of the city.²

There were other charges besides direct loans that the citizens were forced to support that they might pleasure the members of the royal house. The dukes of Gloucester and Bedford came frequently to the royal castle of Fullbrook, which lay some four miles beyond Warwick, and the good folk of the town felt called upon to furnish them with appropriate gifts. Thus in 1434 a sum of 50 marks, with a silver cup, was presented to the duchess of Bedford, and an offering to the duke of 24 pike, 12 bream, 12 tench, and a ton of red wine.³ These presents were often not without some political significance. Thus in

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 55.

² *Ib.* f. 83a.

³ *Ib.* f. 68. The total cost of these presents (exclusive of the 50 marks and the cup), with the carriage, was £12 15s. 4d. In addition to this, the expenses of officers and all the worthy men, riding to Fullbrook, amounted to 29s. 6d.

1431, the year wherein the protector Gloucester made a progress through England on the track of the Lollards, the Coventry men who were, it seems, not free from the suspicion of holding unorthodox tenets, sent to the duke and duchess at Fallbrook a silver cup, 40 marks, and a plentiful supply of fish and wine.¹

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 60a.

X

THE RED AND WHITE ROSE

WE are now come to the time when the history of Coventry is closely interwoven with that of the nation at large. The city and its neighbourhood became the chosen home of the Court circle during the earlier part of the Wars of the Roses. The Lancastrian cause found some of its staunchest supporters among the folk of the "queen's secret harbour," as the city was called, because Margaret of Anjou so often took refuge therein to plot and scheme for the undoing of the Yorkists. But the devotion of Coventry to Lancaster did not last throughout the struggle; the citizens' minds were alienated by the queen's partizan fury at the "Diabolical Parliament" in 1460, and by the unruliness of her troops, and they afterwards professed themselves devoted followers of Edward IV. These professions did not however hinder them from backing the winning side when Edward's supremacy was imperilled through Warwick's revolt, and the Yorkist king punished their treachery by the confiscation of the city liberties. It was only by means of Clarence's costly mediation and the payment of an enormous fine that the citizens were enabled to make their peace with Edward. Thus Coven-

try partook to a greater extent than other towns of the miseries of this dynastic conflict. The citizen class were, as a rule, only too glad to let the barons fight out the question among themselves, submitting, as far as we can judge, to whichever army was victorious and at their gates. After all, the battles of the Roses meant little more than the concentration of the fighting power of the kingdom, usually at that period employed in desultory local warfare, into one place, and frequent provincial frays and skirmishes were really more harmful to the district wherein the feud raged than civil war itself.

For family feuds, sometimes finding vent in pitched battles or in single acts of violence, at others in long lawsuits, were the chief features of the later Lancastrian time. Courtenay and Bonvill, Neville and Percy measured swords one against the other, and many noble families made the law-courts ring, year in year out, with their litigations. Both James, lord of Berkeley, aged sixty-nine, and lady Shrewsbury, aged fifty-two, declared in 1463 that neither of them since their ages of discretion had ever known "any three months' freedom from lawsuits."¹ All this violence and litigation sprang from the excessive power of the nobles, and the power the nobles possessed was in its turn owing to the weakness of the central government. It was a time when a strong man was needed to rule England, and the king was but a weak saint. It mattered little what

¹ Green, *Town Life*, I. 267, cites *Lives of the Berkeleys*, II. 95
See also Denton, *Fifteenth Century*, *passim*.

minister guided Henry's councils. Affairs prospered ill in England whether Suffolk or Somerset held the reins of government in his hand, while in France since the death of Bedford the annals of the army had been one uniform story of disaster. Enraged by the incompetency of the ministers of the Crown, and embittered by the failures it brought forth, the people found in Cade's rebellion in 1450, the nobles in the Yorkish opposition, utterance of the universal discontent.

Happily for the Coventry men there was in the earlier part of the fifteenth century no great lord living within the walls to drag them into his frays and quarrels, and to anticipate that great period of party strife which was so soon to break in upon the kingdom. It is true that the townsfolk had not always been able to keep clear of baronial influence. We hear of fighting between the young earl Stafford, the lord of Maxstoke, and the citizens, though we are not told what was the cause of the quarrel. Such animosity was felt by the two parties at variance that in 1426 the duke of Gloucester summoned the mayor with others of the citizens to Leicester, and bound them over to keep the peace.¹ Men held this earl, better known by his later title of the duke of Buckingham, in great awe, for in war-time he could arm two thousand fighting men bearing the Stafford knot.² "The indignation of the lordship of the said duke,"³ said Sir Baldwin de Montfort, whom Buckingham imprisoned

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 42a.

² Ramsay, *Lanc. and York*, II. 169.

³ Dugdale, *Warw.* II. 1,011.

in Coventry because he made some difficulty about surrendering his manor of Coleshill into the duke's keeping, . . . "had in those days been too heavy and unportable for me to have born." We find the citizens, however, on good terms with this omnipotent nobleman during the civil war; and in 1458 the mayor and his brethren received an invitation to come and share in the festivities which took place at Maxstoke Castle on the occasion of the marriage of one of his younger sons.

It is doubtful whether even Buckingham's great influence would have been sufficient to turn the scale in favour of Lancaster in the coming season of strife if the frequent visits of the king and the princes of the reigning family, as well as the old connexion between the city and the first prince of the blood as duke of Cornwall and earl of Chester, had not bred among the citizens a feeling of loyalty, which kept them on the side of Henry and Margaret for many years. The year 1449 marks a crisis in the reign of king Henry. The reopening of the French war was the herald of a series of swift disasters, which put an end to the rule of the English in France. Town after town opened its gates to the invading host of Frenchmen, and Rouen, and with Rouen the last English foothold in Normandy, capitulated after a siege of nineteen days. To this pass had England been brought under the guidance of Suffolk and Somerset, and the king not only breathed no word of dismissing these unpopular ministers, but gave them every mark of his favour and support.

"It was now," says Mr. Oman, in his *Warwick the King-*

maker,¹ "that the final scission of the two parties that were afterwards to be known as Yorkist and Lancastrian took place. Every man of note in England had now to make choice whether his personal loyalty to the king should lead him into acquiescing in the continuance in office of the ministers whom Henry openly favoured, or whether he would set himself in opposition to the Court faction, even though he was thereby led into opposition to the king."

An unmistakable sign of the times was to be found in the fact that the nobles were quietly arming; and acting probably on a hint from the Court, the Coventry men made ready to equip a goodly number of men for the city's defence. "Every man that hath been mayor," runs the order of leet, "shall provide 4 jacks," with as many sallets, habergeons, and sheaves of arrows for this purpose; while late bailiffs, chamberlains, and all commoners able to bear the cost were respectively required to furnish three, two, and one of these several parts of an archer's accoutrement.² By this means there was provision made for over six hundred men. In the following year, wherein Jack Cade held London in fear for many days, a strong guard of forty armed men kept nightly watch within Coventry.³ As the year drew to a close, there were expectations of war on every side. Wherefore in the beginning of Richard Boys' mayoralty

¹ Oman, *King-maker*, 35.

² *Leet Book*, ff. 144-8. A *jack* was a tunic of stuffed leather; a *sallet*, a helmet; and a *habergeon*, a short coat of mail.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 149a.

(1451) it was resolved that all the fortifications should be made ready in case of attack. At a great meeting of the worthies of the council on the Saturday after the feast of the Purification, a plan of operations was laid down "for strengthening this city, if need be, which God forbid."¹ The town ditch was cleansed by common labour, so as to furnish a surer means of protection. Portcullises were made for the gates, and iron chains to close up the ends of divers lanes in the city.² There was some debate as to whether aldermen should be made over every ward, to whom the men of their several districts might have recourse "if ony aventure falle," but it seems no steps were taken in this direction. Of ammunition the worthy men laid in a plentiful store. Four "gonnes of brasse," two greater called "serpentynes,"³ and two smaller, were cast and brought from Bristol at great cost, for they weighed, we are told, 328 lbs., and the price of transport amounted to 6s. 8d. These guns, "a barell of gonnepowdur," thirteen "pelettes" of iron for the larger, and four dozen of lead for the smaller guns, were kept in the tower of Bablake Gate, in readiness for the troubled times which were at hand.

Though England was rid of Suffolk, who after his impeachment and banishment was killed on board the *Nicholas of the Tower* by some political enemies, affairs in 1451 prospered no better under the guidance of Somerset and the queen, and the whole kingdom was uneasy with foreboding of the coming strife. Doubtless the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 153a.

² *Ib.* f. 154.

³ *Ib.* f. 155.

news of the good order which prevailed in Coventry, and of the great military efforts the citizens had made, reached the ears of the king, as he made a progress through the Midlands in the late summer of that year. And on September 21 he came from Leicester, another famous Lancastrian fortress, to bestow his praises on the rulers of the city.¹ The men of Coventry made great preparations for his welcoming. And in order to avoid "great stody and labor" hereafter, the mayor "let to compile" the account of the king's reception and residence within the city, a sort of manual of etiquette to be referred to in future.

"When the kyng our soveren lord," the *Leet Book* says, "came fro Leycestur toward Coventre, the meyre . . . Richard Boys and his wurthy bredurn arayed in skarlet and all the commonalty² cladde in grene gownes and rede hodes, in Hasellwode be yonde the brode oke on horsbak, attented the comeng of our soveren lorde. And also, sone as they haddon syght of our soueren lordes presens, the meyre and his peres lyghton on fote, [and] mekely thries kneleng on their knees dud unto our soueren lorde ther due obeysaunce, the meyre seyeng to hym thes wordes: 'Most highest and gracious kyng, ye arn welcome to your true lege menne withe all our hertes'; and therewith,

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 156.

² MS. Coialte: this contraction will be henceforth written in full. I deviate from the MS. in putting capital letters to proper names, and in writing these in full wherever contractions occur. I have also substituted small letters for capitals whenever the latter would cause confusion to the modern reader.

after taking the mace from a sergeant, he kissed it, and presented it to Henry. "The kyng," the *Leet Book* continues, "tarieng and herkening the meyres speche in faverabull wyse seyde thes wordes: 'Well seyde, Sir meyre, take your hors.' The meyre then rode forthe afore the kyng bereng his mase in his honde with the knyght-constabull next afore the kynges swerde, the bayles of this cite rideng afore the meyre withe ther mases in ther hondes makeng wey & rome for the kynges comeng; and so they ridon afore the kyng till the kyng come to the vtter¹ yate of the priory. The kyng then forthewithe send for the meyre and his bredurn be a knyght to come to his presence and to speke withe hym in his chambur, and the meyre and his peres accordeng to the kynges comaundement come into his chambur, and thries ther knelleng dudde ther obeysaunse. Thomas Lytelton then recordur² seyde unto the kyng suche wordes as was to his thynkyng most pleasaunt, our soueren lorde seyeng agayne thes wordes, 'Sirs, I thank you of your goode rule and demene and in speciall for your goode rule the last yere past for the best ruled pepull thenne withe in my reame. And also I thank you for the present that ye nowe gaue to vs'—the whiche present was a tonne wyne & XX^{ti} grete fatte oxon. The kyng then moreover gaf hem in comaundement to govern well his cite and to see his pease be well kepte as

¹ Outer.

² Thomas Littleton, of famous memory, whom Coke made familiar to all. This official was the exponent of the law in the mayor's court.

hit hathe ben aforetyme, seying thenne to hem he wolde be ther goode lorde, and so the meyre and his peres departed."

With what a glow of pride the town clerk must have recorded all these gracious sayings, little knowing that the king's good will could avail them nothing in the troublous times that were at hand! Henry, it appears, remained several days at Coventry, the earl of Salisbury and the duke of Buckingham attending upon him there with a numerous following. He was engaged, the historian tells us, upon an ineffectual attempt to bring the dukes of York and Somerset to friendly terms,¹ but the former, far from desiring peace, was at that moment weaving plans for his rival's overthrow. The good-hearted king did not neglect religion in all this pressure of political business.² "The kyng then abydeng stille in the seide priory apon Michaelmas Evon sende to the clerke of his closet to the churche of sent Michell to make redy ther his closette, seyeng that the kyng on Michaelmas day wolde go on procession and also her there hygh masse." The "meyre and his peres" suggested that the bishop of Winchester (Waynflete) should be asked to officiate. "And agayne the kynges comeng to sent Michell churche, the meyre and his peres cladde in skarlet gownes with ther clokes and all oder in ther skarlet gownes wenton vnto the kynges chambur durre ther abydeng the kynges comeng." As an especial honour to the Trinity guild and corporation the clerks

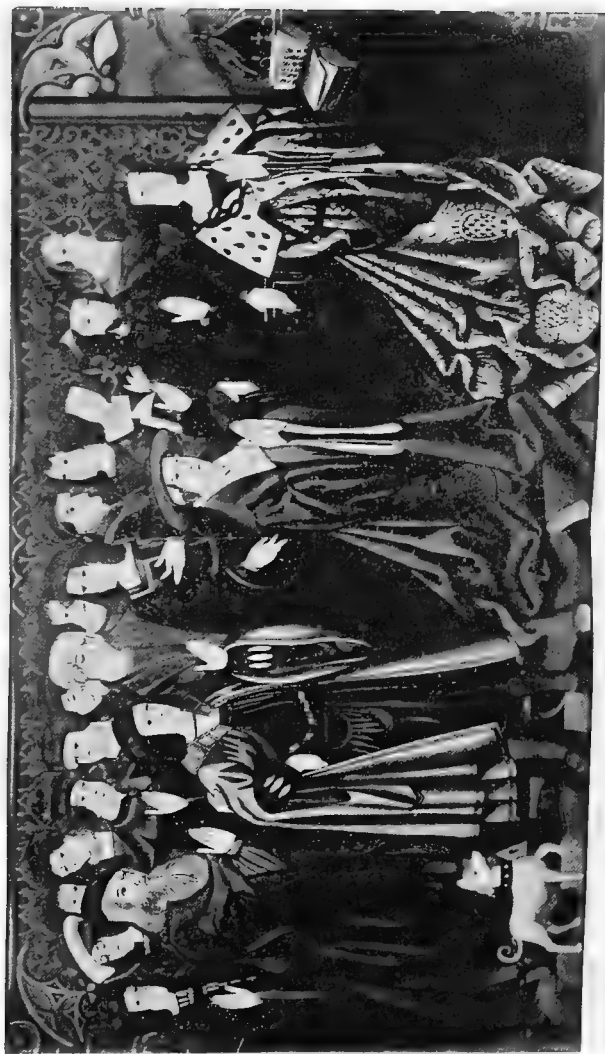
¹ Ramsay, II. 147.

² *Leet Book*, f. 156a.

of Bablake went in the procession through S. Michael's churchyard before the celebration, the king devoutly walking in the train, bare-headed, and "cladde in a gowne of gold tussu furred with a furre of marturn sabull, the meyre bareng the mase afore the kyng, . . . tille he come agayne to his closette. At the whyche masse when the king had offerd and hes lordes also, he sende the lorde Bemond (Beaumont) his chamburlen to the meyre, seyng to him, 'hit is the kinges will ye and your bredurn come and offer,' and so they dudde." After the evensong the king sent by "two for his body and two yeomen of the crown," "the seyde gowne and furre . . . and gave hit frely to god and to sent Michell. Ynsomyche that non of them that brought the gown wolde take no rewarde in no wyse."¹ The beautiful piece of Flemish tapestry still preserved in S. Mary's Hall is said to commemorate this act of piety on the part of this unfortunate king.

Henry did not remain long in Coventry after the celebration of the Michaelmas festival. On the following Tuesday he went to Kenilworth, the corporation and the "commonalty" riding with the company and preserving the same order as they had used at his welcoming a few days previously. When they came to Asthill Grove, "agayne a brode lane the (that) ledethe to Canley . . . the kyng willeng to speke with the meyre and his bredurn seyde to hem thes wordes: 'Sires, I thank you of your goode rule and demene at this tyme, and for goode

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 156a; Sharp, *Antiq.* 17.



PORTION OF THE TAPESTRY, S. MARY'S HALL, SHEWING HENRY VI. AND HIS COURTIER.
THE KNEELING FIGURE PROBABLY REPRESENTS CARDINAL BEAUFORT.

rule among you hadde and in speciall for your good rule of the yere last past, and where as ye ben now baylies we will that ye be hereafter sherefes, and this we graunt to you of our own fre wille and of no spesimal desire. Moreover,' " he went on, mindful no doubt of his own danger, and of the preparations for war among the factious nobles of the country,¹ " 'we charge you withe our pease among you to be kepte and that ye suffer no ryottes, conventiculs ne congregacions of lewde pepull among you, and also that (ye) suffer no lordes lyvereys, knyghtes, ne swyers (squires) to be reseyved of no man withe in you for hit is agayne our statutes . . . and yif ye be thus ruled we will be your good lorde.' And thus don, the meyre and his bredurn takeng ther leve of the kyng . . . departed and ridon to Coventre agayne," no doubt astounded at the idea of this new responsibility and greatness now thrust upon them. The mayor and council held great consultations concerning the bailiffs' acquisition of the sheriffs' dignity summoning Thomas Littleton, their recorder, and Henry Boteler, who was soon to be this famous lawyer's successor in the office, to their deliberations, to learn what privileges were most needful for them to include within the charter which was to convert their city into "the city and *county* of Coventry."²

¹ See Oman, 36, for the covenant entered into by the earl of Salisbury and a Westmoreland knight in 1449, by which the latter agreed to furnish a following of 290 men to accompany the former in time of peace as of war.

² *Leet Book*, f. 156a. The city and the adjoining hamlets

In the year 1453, which saw the defeat of Talbot at Chatillon, the close of the Hundred Years' War, the outbreak of hostilities between Nevilles and Percies, and the birth of a prince of Wales, Henry was attacked by insanity.¹ In 1454 the king's recovery marked the close of the duke of York's protectorate and the restoration to power of the queen's friends, particularly Somerset. The Yorkist party fell into disgrace, and measures were taken to compass their destruction the following spring in a parliament to be held at Leicester. The duke on hearing this drew sword in the north, and marched on London with a goodly following at his back. The royal troops barred his way at S. Alban's; but when the first battle of that long and weary struggle was fought out at that town on the great London highway, the Coventry men were not found in Henry's ranks. In fact the battle was hardly looked for at that time. It is true the townsfolk received a summons for "such feliship . . . in their best and most defensable aray" as they could furnish, and that "having tendurnes of the well fare and also of the saueguard of our soueren lorde," they duly equipped 100 men. Much ado was made to provide the men with a new "pensell" or stan-

were joined together as a county. The mayor, according to the charter, was made steward and marshal of the king's household.

¹ There were great preparations for the civil strife during this year (Ramsay, II. 169). The prince of Wales was invested with the appanage of Cornwall in 1455 (*Ib.* II. 219). The Coventry men thenceforth owned him as their lord and protector.

dard "in tarturme," at a cost of 16*d.*, 14*d.* went "in rybands" to the same, while the making, with a tassel of silk attached to it, cost a similar sum; "bends," or badges of red and green, were also provided, with a garment of red, green, and violet for the captain. But in spite of all this preparation the men never saw S. Alban's fight, or the terrible execution done by Richard, earl of Warwick, among the Lancastrian ranks. For on May 22, the day whereon the mayor received the commission, the battle was fought and over, and the king in the hands of his victorious enemies. "They wenton not," says the *Leet Book*, with some reticence in referring to the soldiers, "for certen tydenges that wern brought," the king having returned to London.¹

Henry was shortly after this again attacked by insanity, and for a few months York was appointed regent. Duke Richard's power did not however wholly cease with the king's recovery, and after March 1456 he continued for some months to direct the government, which was nominally in the hands of the Bouchiers, half-brothers of the duke of Buckingham. Meanwhile the two arch-enemies, the queen and the duke of York, watched and "waited on" each other ceaselessly until August, when Margaret's plans were laid, and she drew off the king to sport in the Midlands, having fortified Kenilworth with cannon in case of another appeal to arms. A great council of notables was summoned to meet at Coventry for October 7.² The news of the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 165a.

² Ramsay, II. 199.

queen's intended visit reached the city about August 24, and a council was called to provide for her highness's welcome.¹ A hundred marks was collected throughout the wards to be given as an offering to the prince of Wales and his mother, together with two cups whereof the joint value exceeded £10 10s. The prince did not, however, accompany the queen on this occasion, so fifty marks were laid aside "against his coming," though the magnificence of his mother's reception was not lessened on this account. The "makyng of the premisses" of the queen's welcoming fell to the lot of one John Wedurby, of Leicester,² and by his arrangement pageants as gaily dressed as at the Corpus Christi festival, with appropriate personages standing thereon to utter words of welcome, were placed at all the principal points in the streets between Bablake and the "utter" gate of the Priory. John Wedurby thought as other men of his time, that Margaret's son would one day have rule in England, and hoped that each party would forget their differences and live in peace under his government.

"The blessyd babe that ye have born prynce Edward is he,
Thurrowe whom pece & tranqulite shall take this reme
(realm) on hand,"

said Prudence to the queen in the pageant of the four Cardinal Virtues; while the prophet Isaiah declared to the queen that,—

"Like as mankynde was gladdid by the birght of Jehus,
So shall this empyre joy the birthe of your bodye."

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 167a.

² *Ib.* f. 170a.

And the companion prophet Jeremiah was equally positive:

"The fragrant floure sprongen of you shall so encrece & sprede,
That all the world yn ich (each) party shall cherisshe hym & love & drede."

In his conception of the queen's character Wedurby was a thorough courtier.

"The mellyflue mekenes of your person shall put all wo away,"

the same prophet said; and S. Edward greeted her as "moder of mekeness."

To what strange freaks will not the rules of his art—and especially alliteration—betray a poet! The "she wolf of France" had nothing of the quality thus assigned to her; her name had merely the same initial letter.

The king and queen entered Coventry on Holy Cross day, by the Bablake Gate.¹ Close by the entrance was a pageant whercon stood the two above-named prophets, and a "Jesse" or figure representing the genealogy of Christ was placed upon the gate itself. At the east end of Bablake church were the figures of the Confessor—in allusion to prince Edward—and S. John the Evangelist. A few paces distant at the conduit in Smithford Street the four Cardinal Virtues were displayed. A second set of pageants, grouped in the open spaces at the Cheaping, next met the queen's eyes. There were the Nine Conquerors, Hector, Alex-

¹ *Lect Book*, ff. 168a-70a, printed in Sharp, *Antiq.* pp. 228-231.

ander, and the rest; and finally by the conduit a stage was placed whereon S. Margaret appeared, "sleying" a grete dragon "by myracull." While upon the cross itself were grouped a company of angels, and the pipes of the conduit ran wine. The king—that most unwarlike of monarchs—received the homage of the Nine Conquerors, while the queen's name-saint gave to her a final salutation:

"Most notabull princes of wymen erthle,
 Dame Margarete, the chefe myrth of thie empyre,
 Ye be hertely welcum to this cyte,
 To the plesure of your highnes I wyll sette my desyre,
 Bothe nature & gentilnes doth me require,
 Seth we be both of one name, to shew you kyndnes,
 Wherefore by my power ye shall have no distresse;
 I shall pray to the prince that is endeles,
 To socour you with solas of his high grace.
 He wyll here my peticion, this is doutles,
 For I wrought all my lyf that his wyll wase;
 Therefore, lady, when ye be yn any dredeful case,
 Call on me boldly, ther of I pray you,
 And trist to me feythfully I well do that may pay you."

John Wedurby was, no doubt, an indifferent poet, but viewed in the light of subsequent events, his verses have all sorts of ironical and tragic meanings, whereof he was, of course, wholly unconscious.

The pageants and welcome entertainments cost the citizens not a little, we may suppose, in time and treasure. They made the king a present of a tun of wine costing £8 0s. 4d.; while by the "advice of his council" the mayor distributed 20s. among "divers persons of the king's house."¹ Lord Rivers too had a glass of rose-

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 170a. On this lavish system of bribes to secure

water at the mayor's expense, whereof the cost was 2s.; thirteen years later his lordship had a very bitter drink at Coventry.¹ Still the coming of the Court no doubt brought trade to the city; had it brought also peace, all would have been well. The council met on October 7, and a blow was aimed at the duke of York in the dismissal of the Bouchiers.² It was even said that the duke's life was in danger, but that his kinsman, the duke of Buckingham, assisted him to escape. Margaret required the presence of Somerset to lend strength to her party, and with him there came, it seems, a company of turbulent retainers. These men fell out with the city-watch and slew three or four of the townsmen; whereat, says a writer in the Paston series, "the larum belle was ronge and the toun arose and would have jouperdit to have distressed the men of the duke of Somerset, ne had the duke of Buks taken direccion therin."³ Coventry was already ceasing to be the well-ordered and peaceful place whereon the mind of king Henry loved to dwell. Next year we hear that the civic finances were disorganized, that the officers of the city were negligent in the performance of their duty, and that the citizens, being "of froward dispositions,"

the friendship of great folk, see Green, I. 212: "Bribes were given largely and openly; registered in the public accounts and given to any official, great or small, who might be induced to show his friendship."

¹ Beheaded on Gosford Green, 1469.

² York and Warwick swore to keep the peace (Ramsay, II. 199).

³ *Paston Letters* (ed. Gairdner), I. 408.

were inclined to appeal to "mighty men in strange shires" for their support in carrying on lawsuits against their neighbours in courts without the city.¹

In February, 1457, the court was again at Coventry; the king came thither on the 11th "to his bedde," and the queen coming "suddenly" next day "unto her mete."² Margaret was doubtless burdened with some weighty tidings, for "she came rydyng byhynde a man, and so rode the most part of all her gentylwemen then, at which tyme she sende vn to the meyre and his brethern that she wold not that [the] spiritualte ne the temporalte shold be laburd to met her then, and so she was not met at that tyme." A great council³ was held at Coventry from February 15 to March 14, all the great men of both parties being present, and the duke of York was reappointed to the deputyship of Ireland. Henry left the city for Kenilworth on March 14, the mayor and his brethren, and a "goodly fellowship of the city" having "right great thank" for accompanying his high-

¹ See Thompson, 89 (pocket ed.), for the disorganized condition of Leicester in 1467. The towns of England seem to have been more affected by the Wars of the Roses than historians would have us suppose. ² *Leet Book*, f. 172a.

³ The archbishop of York, the bishops of Winchester, London, Lincoln, Norwich, Exeter, Worcester, Chester, Hereford and Salisbury; the abbots of Glastonbury, Bury S. Edmunds, Gloucester, Malmesbury, Cirencester; Lawrence Booth, privy seal; the dukes of Exeter, Buckingham, Somerset; the earls of Shrewsbury, treasurer, Stafford, Northumberland, Arundel and Devonshire; the lord of S. John's, the lords Roos, Suydeley, steward of the Household, Stanley, Beauchamp, Berners, Grey de Ruthyn, Lovell, Wells, Willoughby, and Dudley, were present.

ness "to the utter side of their franchise."¹ A characteristic touch is given concerning Margaret's departure for Coleshill two days later.² The mayor, his brethren, and a "feyre felyship" of the commons—we seem to gather from these words that there was but a scanty attendance—went with queen Margaret to the boundary of the city liberties. The mayor, having his mace in his hand, rode immediately before her, the sheriffs with their white yards or rods directly preceding the mayor. Hitherto this ceremony in its completeness had only been observed when the king was in question. "And so," the *Leet Book* says, "they did never be fore the quene tyll then, for they bere before that tyme alwey their sergeants' mases . . . at her comynges, at which doying her officers groged (grudged), seying the quene owed to be met yn like fourme as the kyng shold, which yn dede," the writer continues with some trepidation, "as ys seide owe to be so, except her displeser wold be eschewed."³

An unexplained rising took place at Hereford in April, and the king and queen went thither to quell it, Margaret alienating even her friends in that district by her severity. At Whitsuntide, however, the whole Court again sojourned at Coventry, and a grand procession at the Pentecostal feast dazzled the eyes of the citizens.⁴ The duke of Buckingham followed next after Henry, but lord Beaumont "bere the kynges treyne," the earl of Stafford "his cap of astate," and Sir John Tunstall his sword. The great nobles followed every one in his proper rank,

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 172a.² *Ib.* f. 173.³ *Ibid.*⁴ *Ibid.*

while after the queen and her chief lady, the duchess of Buckingham, there came "mony moo ladyes yn her mantels, surcotes, and other appareyll to theyre astates acustumed." Mass was celebrated in the cathedral by the bishop of Hereford, assisted by the dean of the king's chapel, the prior and his monks.

Queen Margaret could occasionally be gracious, and her eagerness to see the Mystery Plays performed at the feast of Corpus Christi must have flattered the citizens. She came "prively" from Kenilworth on the eve of the festival, and "lodged at Richard Wodes, the grocer,¹ where Richard Sharp some tyme dwelled; and there all the pleyes were furst pleyde," save *Doomsday*, the drapers' pageant, which could not be seen, for evening came on and put a close to the performance. The mayor and bailiffs sent a present to Richard Wood's house, namely "ccc (300) paynemaynes, a pipe of rede wyne, a dosyn capons of haut grece (?), a dosyn of grete fat pykes, a grete panyer full of pescodes and another panyer of pipyns and orynges, & ij cofyns of counfetys, & a pot of grene gynger." Quite a little court was assembled at the grocer's house to witness those strange spectacles in which the dramatic instinct of the Middle Ages found vent. The duke of Buckingham and his lady, who might be regarded as natives of the city, would do the honours of the place; and let us hope those ardent Lancastrians, lord Rivers and his lady, and the elder and younger countess of Shrewsbury, applauded the ravings of Pilate

¹ *Lcet Book*, f. 173a.

and Herod, the pompous characters of the religious drama, or heard with complaisance the devil's jokes. It is hard to imagine queen Margaret, that tireless fighter and plotter, or lady Shrewsbury, the great Talbot's widow, whose feud with the Berkeleys filled Gloucestershire with strife for over a generation, engaged in such a harmless amusement as laughing over the quaint performances of their citizen supporters, nibbling the while some of the good mayor's supply of apples and sweetmeats. How delighted the citizens were at her highness's condescension! When she went next day "to her mete" to Coleshill, "right a good feliship—which plesid her highnes right well,"—attended her to the "vtmast side of theyre franchise, where hit plesyd her to gyff them grete thank bothe for theyre present and theyre gentyll attendaunce." In the August of that same year, the month wherein De Brezé, seneschal of Normandy, at Margaret's instigation, plundered the English coast, Henry and his queen again visited Coventry, sleeping there from August 31 until September 2, and "about x of the belle" on the latter day the queen rode to Sharneford and on to sleep at Leicester "toward the forest of Rokyngham for to hunt," while at two o'clock Henry rode forth on his journey towards Northampton, and the men of Coventry did not see them again for two years, when a more troubled scene had opened.

The records of Coventry are nothing but a blank during the succeeding years; for the council merely met at the appointed season to elect a mayor, but transacted, as far as we know, no other business; tradition has

it that the city was divided against itself, a highly probable case when we consider how high the tide of Yorkist and Lancastrian party spirit was running in the rest of the country. In the political world this season was filled by ineffectual peacemakings and renewed preparations for war. Warwick, after provoking the wrath of the Lancastrian party, fled to Calais, and his father, Salisbury, met and worsted lord Audley, the royalist leader, who had been sent to capture him, at the field of Bloreheath (September 23, 1459). The Yorkist lords flew to arms; but when the king proposed to give battle at Ludford, weakened by the defection of a certain Andrew Trollope, they all dispersed and fled. The Yorkists being thus humbled, the time was come for Margaret's vengeance. No writs were sent to the principal Yorkist chiefs for the parliament summoned to meet at Coventry on November 20, and the knights and burgesses were nominated by the Lancastrian leaders. The assembly met, and, by one sweeping act of attainder, deprived twenty-three leading Yorkists of their inheritance. People called this the "diabolical parliament"; henceforward there was no hope of a reconciliation between York and Lancaster. A petition¹ presented by John Rous, the antiquary of Guy's Cliffe, to this parliament calling attention to the pillage of the towns by the nobility, testifies to the misfortunes of those places which fell into the hands of these lawless family chiefs and their retainers.

¹ *Dict. Nat. Biography*, s.v. Rous.

It seems that the queen's late violent proceedings, or the plundering propensities of her followers, had caused the townspeople to grow somewhat cold in her cause. When a commission of array dated from Northampton arrived a few days before the Candlemas feast, 1460, the sheriffs kept it back, and it was fourteen days before the newly-elected mayor, John Wyldegrys,¹ received the missive addressed to his predecessor conveying the king's command. This was surely not the result of accident but design, the sheriffs having their own reasons for thwarting the mayor, or being ardent Yorkists. Then the duke of Buckingham arrived, perhaps to learn the reason of the delay, and the mayor bethought him of this indiscretion. "To my lord of Buckingham," lodging at the "Angel," he sent to ask whether "any hurt might grow to the city" because of the neglect of the commission, and to ensure the duke's goodwill, sent thirty loaves, two pike, two tench, some capons, a peacock, and a peahen to his lodging.

A letter which he received from the king about this time hardly tended, it may be thought, to reassure John Wyldegrys.² "For asmuche," the king wrote, "as credible reporte is made vn to us howe diuers of th' inhabitantes of oure cite of Coventre haue, sithe the tyme of oure departyng from thens, vsed and had right vn-fittyng langage ayenst oure estate and personne, and in fauouring of oure supersticious³ traitours, and rebelles, nowe late in oure parlement there attainted, wherby

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 180a.² *Ib.* f. 181.³ Query?

grete comocions and murmur ben like to folowe, to the grete distourbanche of oure feithfull, true subgettes, onlesse than punisshement and remede for the redresse therof the rather be had, we therfor . . . charge you diligently t' enquer and make serche among the seid inhabitants of suche vnfitting langage as is aboue seid, and do theym to be emprysoned and punisshed accordyng to their demerits, and in example of other of semblable condicion, as ye desyre to do that shall please vs." ¹

John Wyldegrys probably executed this commission with all the alacrity of fear, and we hear that in the following October the duke of York had a strange commission to sit in judgment on various offenders in Coventry "to punish them by the fawtes to the kyng's lawys." But the duke, who was on his way home from Ireland, could not afford to tarry, having weightier business on hand, namely, the laying claim to the throne of England, and the drawing up of a genealogy to lay before parliament, showing that his claim to the throne was based on rightful inheritance. Since the battle of Northampton (July 10, 1460), the king had been in the hands of the Yorkist lords, Salisbury and Warwick.² At this battle, too, Henry lost Buckingham, the most powerful man at the time in Warwickshire, and a pillar of the Lancastrian cause. After his death, may-be, the men of Coventry felt more free to choose what side they would,

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 181.

² Henry was at Coventry when he heard of the landing of the Yorkist lords Salisbury and Warwick on June 23 (Holinshed, III. 654).

and the plunder wherein Margaret's host indulged after Wakefield (December 14) and S. Alban's (February 6, 1461) completed their alienation from the Lancastrian party. The Yorkists had now the upper hand in the city. After the battle of S. Alban's £100 was collected throughout the wards for men to go to London with "the earl of March,"¹ who, since his father's death at Wakefield, had become the hope of the Yorkist cause. On the day after his coronation (March 5) Edward IV. despatched a letter to the mayor and his brethren full of thanks for the citizens' loyalty to his cause, praying for their "good continuance in the same," and praising their "good and substantial rule." He thus assured the support of the people of the place, and on the terrible field of Towton, where "the dead hindered the living from coming to close quarters," the men of Coventry fought under the standard of the Black Ram in the Yorkist ranks. The *Leet Book* tells us that £80 was collected throughout the wards for the 100 men "which went with oure soverayn liege lord kyng Edward the IIIIth to the felde yn the north."²

Many of the towns took part with Edward in this famous battle, for order and good government seemed more likely to follow from the Yorkist than the Lancastrian rule. Each town went to the field under their ancient ensign. As a contemporary ballad has it:

"The wolf came fro Worcester, ful sure he thought to byte,
The dragon came fro Gloucester, he bent his tayle to smyte;

¹ Afterwards Edward IV. (*Leet Book*, f. 185.) ² *Ib.* f. 185a.

The griffin cam fro Leycester, flying in as tye,
The George cam fro Nottingham, with spere for to fyte.”¹

The citizens certainly continued to deserve the king's favour. They presented him with £100 and a cup to his “welcome to his cite of Coventre from the felde yn the North,”² and decorated the city with pageants and goodly shows in his honour, the smiths' craft providing the character of Samson, who no doubt, gave in appropriate verses the promise to use his great strength in defending the king's just claim “to his newly-acquired sovereignty.”³ In that year also all men dwelling in the city were sworn to king Edward to be “his true lege men.” In later times the king learnt to distrust this ancient Lancastrian refuge, but for the present there was nothing but amity between himself and the citizens. So vivid was the remembrance of the plundering of Margaret's army, that the old loyalty towards the Lancastrians turned to rancour. And the following year, on the King-maker's coming—the first important mention of him in the city annals—£40 was collected to be given to him for the payment of forty men that went to the north to resist “king Herry and queen Margaret *that were*, and alle other with theym accompanied, as Scottes and Frenchemen, of theyre entre yn to this lande.” The mere whisper of a foreign alliance and invasion was sufficient to damn the Lancastrian cause, for lord Rous, with other refugees, aided by the

¹ Thompson, *Leicester*, 88. ² *Leet Book*, f. 181a.

³ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 152.

Scots, were making trouble on the Border. The men returned on July 29, for the north was pacified, men believed, the Scots having rebellions, stirred up by king Edward, to look to nearer home.

XI

THE LAST STRUGGLE OF YORK AND LANCASTER—THE TUDORS

THE men of Coventry settled down under the rule of Edward IV.; and if the clash of arms was heard in the north—for Margaret would not tamely submit to lose her son's inheritance—it did not disturb the Midlands. Henry VI., the weak, mad, saintly king, lay in the Tower of London, and men thought the Yorkist firmly seated on his throne. Edward treated the Coventry folk graciously enough, paying them several visits at this time¹; but another figure had begun to loom large in English politics, and Warwick, the King-maker, now exercised even more power in the Midlands than had been enjoyed by the Lancastrian Buckingham. The great earl was becoming rapidly estranged from his young kinsman, Edward, whom he had helped to place on the throne. Jealousy of the queen's relations, and the decay of his own influence in the royal councils, were rapidly converting Warwick into a secret enemy of the ruling house. Edward was in favour of a Burgundian alliance; the King-maker, on the contrary, pressed forward the claims of France to the friendship of England,

¹ The king was at Coventry at Christmas 1467, doubtless to keep an eye of Warwick's movements (Ramsay, II. 327).

and when the king treated the French ambassadors with scant courtesy, his too powerful subject entered into intrigues with Louis XI. on his own behalf. He had some thoughts of placing on the throne his future son-in-law, the duke of Clarence; and Calais, where the earl and the king's brother were staying, became in 1469 a perfect hot-bed of conspiracy.

How far Warwick carried with him the general sentiment of English folk is rather doubtful, but so great was his territorial influence that he was a highly dangerous enemy. Besides, there were various elements of disaffection abroad in the land. The Lancastrians had still some hold on the hearts of those living in the north and west, while others who had expected an era of peace and perfection under Yorkist rule were naturally disappointed at the small results of Edward's government. Though there seems to have been no very distinct notion of what the people wanted, one thing was clear, they wanted a change, and the country was filled with the old tokens of unrest and discontent. Bad times seem rather unaccountably to have befallen the people of Coventry; the city was deeply in debt, and on that account the citizens were probably more willing to lend an ear to Warwick's emissaries. It is possible that foreign trade relations may have more to do than we are at present aware with town politics. The great merchants of the Staple, who were heads of the powerful civic families, and who possessed the monopoly of trade in wool, would welcome the alliance with Burgundy, and a ready export of the raw material to Flanders; while the bulk of

the townsfolk, clothworkers and artisans, were glad that the wool should be kept in England and be converted into cloth by home manufacture. For that reason Warwick and his anti-Burgundian policy may have been popular in clothworking towns such as Coventry then was.

We follow with difficulty the record of obscure risings which marked the beginning of a fresh struggle. Two movements agitated the north in the early part of the year 1469. One seems to have been a Lancastrian outbreak; the other, under Robin of Redesdale, was undoubtedly fomented by Warwick. The men of Coventry found themselves as usual drawn into the strife. They were compelled to pay, and send fifty men to York against the rebels,¹ who joined their forces together, and finally turned southwards under Sir John Coniers towards the Midlands. For some time Edward appeared unconscious of the danger that threatened him, and during June he went quietly on a progress through the eastern counties. At last there came a rude awakening. On July 1² he

¹ *Leet Book* f. 203a. The mayor, William Saunders, dyer, gave £5 to the collection of money for the soldiers, so that poor people might be spared (*Ib.* f. 204). Either owing to the fact that the cause was unpopular, or that the people were weary of war, soldiers could not be had under 10*s.* a day. The air at this time was filled with rumours; one John Baldwin, cordwainer, of Dartmouth, had been committed to ward within the city for delivering treasonable letters in England, though he did it "out of innocence of simpleness," being unaware of their contents (*Ib.* f. 203).

² The first commission of array, dated Stamford, July 5, urged the citizens to send 100 archers against the rebels. The

wrote from Fotheringay, bidding the mayor take and commit to ward any person using seditious language among the king's liege people to the intent to "stor and incens theym to remor and comocion"; and later letters were urgent in their appeals for despatch of men. Meanwhile the extent of Warwick's plotting stood revealed. On July 12 came tidings from this arch conspirator, who, far from being the haughty noble of the conventional type, was, as his latest biographer¹ tells us, very affable in his bearing, and an ardent seeker after the commonalty's good will. Warwick had very probably gained a strong party among the populace at Coventry, and in addition to the letter destined for the mayor, the messenger bore a duplicate addressed to his master's "servonds and welwyllers" within the city.² "Ryght trusty and well belovyd frende," the earl wrote to the mayor, William Saunders, "I grete you well. Forsomuche as hyt hath plesyd the kings gode grace to sende after hys lords and other hys subgetts to atende on hys hignes northwards, and that both the ryght hye and myghti prince, my lord the duke of Clarence, and I be fully purposid, after the solempnizacion of the mariage by Godds grace in short tyme to be had bytwene my sayd lord and my dohghter, to a wayte upon the same, and to drawe vn to our said soveryn lordes hyghnes, therfor desyr and pray you that ye will in the

second (Newark, July 10) bade them hasten their preparations and make no risings or assemblies (*Ib.* f. 204a.).

¹ See Oman, *Warwick the King-maker*. ² *Leet Book*, ff. 204a, 205.

meene tyme geve knowlache to all suche felysshipp as ye mowe make toward theym in the best wyse they can, and that bothe ye and they defensibly arrayd be redy upon a days warnyng to accompany my sayd lord and me toward the sayd highnes, as my specyall trust ys in yowe; yevyng credens to this berer in that he shall open vnto you on my behalve, and our Lord have you in hys keping. Writon at London the xxvii day of Juyn." The marriage thus referred to was solemnized some ten days or more after the date of the missive—July 11, Clarence and archbishop Neville having secretly stolen over to Calais, where Warwick was then posted, to take part in the ceremony; and the next day the King-maker and his following landed on the coast of Kent.

The letter¹ as it stands conveys but scanty indications of the real state of affairs, but no doubt the citizens read between the lines, and in "giving credence to the bearer" heard as much as the earl wished of his plans for the overthrow of the queen's relations and the recovery of the Neville influence. Whether they understood that Clarence, Warwick's son-in-law, was to occupy his brother Edward's place, and be raised to the throne, is another matter. Nevertheless they must have been somewhat bewildered by Warwick's change of front.

¹ A manifesto, dated July 12, calling upon "all true subjects" to join Warwick in presenting certain articles of petition to the king" (*v. Ramsay*, II. 337), is not mentioned in the *Leet Book*. The citizens of Coventry did not, it seems, join Warwick, they sent men to Edward (*Leet Book*, f. 205a).

Lancaster they knew, and York they knew, but they might with all justice ask, "Who are ye?" of the King-maker.

Once more, as in Margaret's time, Coventry, with its command of the north-western road, became a centre of operations. News now came thick and fast. Coniers' army of Yorkshiresmen, supplied with a later manifesto and petition of grievances promulgated by Warwick, and the royal troops under Herbert and Stafford of Southwick, were converging towards Banbury. On Maudlin day (July 22) Coventry was hastily fortified, certain of the principal citizens overlooking the equipment of soldiers and the strengthening of the gates with cannon. On the 26th July the battle of Edgcote was fought near Banbury, ending in the discomfiture of Herbert and the royalist troops. For just when victory seemed assured, a rabble of Northampton men, led by one John Clapham, bearing the banner of the White Bear, and shouting "a Warwick! a Warwick!" appeared over the hillside in the rear of lord Herbert's men, and they, thinking the earl himself was come, broke and fled. "Lord Herbert," the *Leet Book* says, "was taken in fight by Banbury with Robin of Redesdale" on the vigil of S. James, and was brought to Northampton, and there beheaded, and lord Richard Herbert, with others.² Some days afterwards Edward was captured at Honiley or Olney, near Kenilworth, and brought by archbishop Neville to Coventry, there to meet the archbishop's

¹ Ramsay, II. 342.

² *Leet Book*, f. 205a.

"brother of Warwick."¹ He was detained in the city as a prisoner until August 9. But even then his humiliation was not complete. Three days later, when the king was certainly no further removed from the city than Warwick, the father and brother of Edward's queen, lord Rivers and his son, John Woodville, who had been captured by rioters at Chepstow, fell into Warwick's hands, and were beheaded on Gosford Green by his order.² The *Leet Book* also records the executions of lord Stafford of Southwick at Bridgewater, and again that of Sir Humphrey Neville, a Lancastrian, and Charles, his brother, who had risen in rebellion in September, in the "north coasts," and that of the bailiff of Durham at the same time ("et ballivus de Duram eodem tempore"). It was on the occasion of this northern or Lancastrian rising that the Nevilles found themselves forced to release Edward; for the unpopular ministers having been brought to justice, there was a feeling abroad that the king should be set free.

So far Warwick's revolt had been successful, but it did not wholly gratify his ambition. No doubt he felt that the king was hopelessly alienated, and, whenever powerful enough, would free himself from the influence of the house of Neville. Fresh troubles broke out, this time in

¹ Ramsay, II. 343; Oman, *Warwick*, 189. Oman says Olney in Northamptonshire.

² "Item XII^o die August eodem anno dominus le revers (lord Rivers), tunc thesaurarius Anglie, fuit decollatus apud Gosford grene, et dominus Johannes Wodvyle, filius ejus, similiter" (*Leet Book*, f. 205a).

Lincolnshire, in February, 1470. Warwick's agents so worked on the fears of the people that they rose in great numbers, and converted a local dispute into a rising of some magnitude. A royal missive, bearing date February 9, arrived at Coventry late in the evening, and in accordance with the commission, money was collected throughout the wards for men to go to Grantham by March 12.¹ The king's letter was imperative; there were rebels and outward enemies abroad, it said, "and many assemble for the retaining of the said enemies, so that if their malice be not withstanden, it might grow to the great jeopardy of us and to the destruction of all true subjects." Edward defeated the rebels at Empingham, near Stamford, on 12th March, and so sudden was their flight that the battle received the name of *Lose-coat Field*. Meanwhile the ringleaders, mainly belonging to the Welles family, were brought in; but before execution they showed that Clarence and Warwick were seriously implicated in their designs. Edward, whose suspicions were thoroughly aroused, sent to the duke and earl at Coventry, bidding them disband their levies, for they were followed by a great number of men, and join him without delay; but they would not, merely sending excuses and promises.² And perhaps it was then that Clarence, being in need of money, left in pledge a "coronall," garnished with "rubies, diamonds, and sapphires," in return for a loan of 300 marks from the citizens.³

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 208.

² Ramsay, II. 350.

³ Corp. MS. see below, p. 189.

Finally Warwick and the king's brother, after trying the disposition of men's minds towards their cause in the northern parts, turned southwards, whither Edward followed them; but they had already taken ship at Dartmouth when the king reached Exeter. Edward passed through Coventry on his way southwards, and forty men went with the king on April 5 to the south coasts, taking the great sum of 12*d.*¹ a day for payment. For the citizens of Coventry—provident men—afforded help to either party, hoping surely to have their reward whichever side might prevail in the end. They admitted Clarence and Edward, and furnished the former with money and the latter with men. This shows either that they took a dispassionate view of these dynastic and political struggles in which they had no concern, or that they were more deeply involved in them than we imagine, but parties being so evenly balanced in the city, the presence or near neighbourhood of a leader of either party was sufficient for the time being to turn the scale in his favour.

The two conspirators sailed for Calais, but there the merchants of the Staple were heart and soul for Edward and the Burgundian alliance, and the garrison being in their pay, closed the harbour against them. So they put

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 209. Troops went from Coventry to support Edward in 1469 and 1470. On both these occasions the men took 12*d.* a day. But the next year, when the Lancastrians were ruling, and a war with Burgundy was in prospect, only 6*d.* a day was given to the soldiers. Was the Lancastrian cause and war with Burgundy popular then?

into the Seine, and Warwick, abandoning his old project of dethroning Edward to make room for Clarence, prepared to take up a more definite policy, and made overtures to the Lancastrians. It is difficult to imagine how queen Margaret could bring herself to forgive the man who had wrought so much evil to her and hers. But Louis XI., king of France, who knew that if the Yorkists continued to reign they would strengthen Burgundy, his great foe, acted as peacemaker, and the compact between Lancaster and Neville was sealed by the betrothal of Warwick's daughter to the prince of Wales. When the King-maker and the Lancastrian lords landed at Plymouth in September, they caught Edward unawares in the north, and they replied to his summons, ordering them to appear at court "humbly and measurably accompanied," by proclaiming Henry VI. king of England. The army in the north declared for king Henry; for the moment the game was up; Edward IV. fled to Lynn, and took ship for the Low Countries.

The Coventry *Leet Book* thus summarizes the year's events:¹ "In the Lenton when William Stafford was mayor . . . the Lord Wellys² were behedyd. The duke of Clarence and the yrl of Warw[ick] w[ent] out of the londe, and went to the kynge off France, and there were gretly cheryshyd, and there was a m[arriage] [m]ade by twix prinse Edward and a dohghter of the sayd

¹ The square brackets enclose words which are missing in the MS. The records were hastily written at the time, and are much mutilated (*Leet Book*, f. 210a).

² Welles, leader of the revolt in Lincolnshire.

yrle of Warwick. And in the monthe of Sept[ember] the sayd duke and yrle with the yrle of Oxynford, the yrle of Pembroke,¹ brother to kyng Harry, the bastard ffawkynbruge² comyn a londe at Ex—.³ They ther drewe to hem much pepull, or they com to Coventry, they wer xxx thowsand. [Ky]ng Edward laye at Notynham, and sende for lordes and all other men, but ther com so lytell pep[ull] to hym that he was not abyll to made a fylde a gaynes hem, and then he with the yrle [R]evers, the lorde Hastyng,⁴ the lord Howard, and the lorde Say went to Lynne, and ther goten hem shippies, and sayledon to the duke of Borgoyne,⁵ the whiche duke hade weddyd kyng Edwards syster, the lady Margete. And the duke of Clarens, the yrle off Warwick, the yrle of Oxynford, the yrle of Shroysbery, the lord Stanley, [and] the bysshoppe of Yorke⁶ went to the tower at London, and set out of prison kyng Hary the Syxt, the wyche hade be ix yer and a half and mor⁷ as a prisonere, and brohgt hym to the bysshoppes palys at Powlys⁸ in London, and made hym there to take on hym to be kyng as he was afore tyme. And then was the yrle of Wyrseter⁹ behedyt at London. . . . The quene that

¹ Jasper Tudor, half-brother to Henry VI.

² Thomas Neville, natural son of lord Fauconberg.

³ Query? They landed at Dartmouth and Plymouth.

⁴ Hastings. ⁵ Burgundy. ⁶ Archbishop Neville.

⁷ Not quite correct. Henry VI. was taken by the Yorkists, July, 1465. Hence he had only been in prison five years.

⁸ S. Paul's.

⁹ Tiptoft, earl of Worcester, the "Butcher," beheaded October 18, at Tower Hill.



From a photograph by STAIRCASE S. MARY'S HALL, COVENTRY, *[Bidford & Co*
SHOWING THE FIGURE OF HENRY VI. FROM THE CROSS, NOW DEMOLISHED.

was wyfe to kyng Edward, with hyr moder, the duches of Bedford,¹ toke seynt wary² at Westmynster, and ther the quene was lyght of a son that was crystonyd Edward."

So the year that had seen such astonishing events now drew to a close. England saw one king displaced by a powerful subject after a bloodless struggle, and another, weak, possibly imbecile, and long a neglected prisoner, restored to his former state; a queen driven to take sanctuary for fear of her husband's enemies, and the birth of a prince of Wales, the history of whose short unhappy life accords well with the inauspicious season of his coming into the world. Though Englishmen passively accepted these changes, Warwick's position was still one of great difficulty; the king's weakness, Margaret's delay in France, and last the unstable temper of "false, fleeting, perjured Clarence," all combined to make the firm establishment of the restored dynasty a matter involving risk on every hand.

John Bette counted the beginning of his mayoralty in January, 1471, according to the regnal year of Henry VI., and the townspeople doubtless considered that the rule of the Yorkists was a thing of the past.³ Perhaps the craftsmen party were pleased with the reversal of policy which followed on the reaccession of the Lancastrian king. The French king held Warwick to an agreement to make war with Burgundy. And war with Burgundy

¹ Widow, first of the duke of Bedford, and then of lord Rivers.

² Sanctuary. ³ *Leet Book*, f. 211.

meant interruption in the Flemish wool trade, and a plentiful supply of wool for the home market. In the following March forty men, now waged at 6*d.* a day, were commissioned to go for two months to Flanders.¹ But the Flemings, by their support of the fugitive king, Edward IV., carried the war into the enemy's country. On March 14, 1471, Edward landed at Ravenspur, to claim—so he averred—the duchy of York, his ancestral inheritance. Slipping past Montagu, who had been set to guard the north road, he pressed on towards the Midlands. Followers presently flocked to his standard, and on March 29, coming from Leicester, he offered battle beneath the walls of Coventry. Warwick, who lay within the city, waiting for fresh levies, had not troops sufficient to accept the challenge, and suffered Edward to pass on, and cut off his communications with London.

The citizens of Coventry must have long remembered this terrible season, "the Lenton next afore Barnet ffield," and the hurried and almost unintelligible writing of the *Leet Book*, with the frequent and probably intentional mutilation of its pages, bespeak the agitation and confusion which filled men's thoughts. There could be no temporizing now the great earl was within their gates, no making overtures to the returning Yorkists, who, now that there was no army barring the way to the capital, found their position greatly increased in strength. The townsfolk lent Warwick 100 marks,² and during that period of terrible anxiety, wherein the earl

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 211*a.*

² *Ib.* f. 211*a.*

was waiting for the levies under Montagu from the north, Oxford from the east, and Clarence from the south-west, they sent "riders into the country" to bring back tidings, and having fortified their city, kept a strict watch.¹ The levies under Clarence never came to the earl's aid, for meeting Edward on the road between Warwick and Banbury, the duke deserted the cause of his father-in-law, and was "right lovingly reconciled" to Edward. Afterwards Clarence, stung perhaps with remorse at his desertion, sent unto the earl "to require him to take some good wail with king Edward"² . . . the earle (after he had patientlie heard the duke's message) he seemed greatlie to abhorre his unfaithfull dealing. . . . To the messengers (as some write) he gave none other answer but this: that he had rather be like himselfe than like a false and perjured duke; and that he was fullie determined never to leave warre till he had either lost his owne life or utterlie subdued his enimies."

Strengthened by Clarence's levies, the king again returned to offer battle on April 5 before the gates of Coventry, but as Warwick still refused, he drew off down the Watling Street towards London. The citizens of Coventry continued faithful to Warwick, and when he left for the capital to stake his all on a battle with Edward, twenty horsemen and twenty foot from the city set forth with him on the eventful march, and fought

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 213. 33s. was paid for guns, to "riders in the country and watchmen." ² *Holinshed*, III. 682.

at Barnet Field. But when the battle was over the terror-stricken townsmen would fain—in Clarence's words—have "made so good a way with king Edward," and did all that in them lay to appease the conqueror. Margaret of Anjou and her son had landed two days after the battle. Prince Edward no doubt expected aid from the Lancastrian stronghold, and sent a proclamation from Chard, where he then was, to Coventry. But the townfolk knew that the day was with the Yorkist king.

The *Leet Book* records the receipt of "a letter fro Edward, the son of Harry the VIth the xxv day of Aprile, that was wryton at Cherd the xviii day of Aprile the whyche was sent to Kyng Edward and the messenger therewith to Abyndon."¹ But they were not allowed to make their peace after this easy fashion. In May Edward came to Coventry, deprived the mayor, John Bette, of the civic sword, and confiscated the liberties of the city, which were only redeemed by a payment of 500 marks.² The citizens owed even this grace to Clarence's mediation. They received a charter of pardon "for the hevvy greffe that our soverayn lord beer to the citee . . . ffor the tyme that Richard, late Erle of Warwyke, with oder to hym then accompanied, kept the citee in defence against his Royall highness in the Lenton next afore Barnett ffield."³ Clarence's mediation and

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 211.

² Dugdale, I. 143. In the *Leet Book* (f. 214a) there is the record of a collection evidently made for this fine.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 217.

the king's pardon cost the citizens a further sacrifice. Edward brought his influence to bear upon them for the release of the jewel, which the duke's necessities had induced him to leave in pledge, in return for the loan of 300 marks. This "coronall," the deed declares, "had been utterly forfeit for two years past," as the duke had not discharged the debt. But as Clarence had "laboured to be good lord" unto the citizens, the mayor agreed to remit a portion of the money owing, and to deliver up the jewel "for the singular pleasure and good grace of our sovereign lord, king Edward."¹

The reconciliation being accomplished, the citizens were eager to show their entire loyalty to king Edward, and accordingly granted a most splendid reception—equal to that given to Margaret eighteen years before—to the four-year-old prince of Wales on his visit to Coventry (April, 1474) for S. George's feast. The mayor and divers of the commonalty, arrayed in green and blue, met the prince with the gift of a gilt "cuppe" and a "kerchief of plesaunce" upon it. At the Bablake gate stood a pageant, with figures of Richard II. and many nobles thereupon. The character of king Richard II., in allusion to the York genealogy, saluted the child, "of the right lyne of royall blode" with a verse of greeting. There were further pageants "with mynstralcye of harpe and dowsemeris" (dulcimers); and at the Broadgate stood S. Edward (who had done duty on a previous

¹ Corp. MS. (Not in Mr. J. C. Jeaffreson's catalogue.) See also *Leet Book*, f. 217.

occasion) with "mynstralecy of harpe & lute," and more verses with allusions to the prince's father's "imperial right," wherefrom he "had been excluded by full furious intent," by way of welcome.

What wonderful memories these local poets possessed! Their verses show how the old friendship of the city to Lancaster had wholly escaped their remembrance! When the little prince rode in his "chare" down to the Cheaping, he beheld three prophets at the Cross, and above were "Childer of Issarell" casting down flowers and cakes, and four pipes running wine. The three kings of Colen (Cologne) were also pressed into the service; but the great feature of the show was the pageant of S. George upon the conduit of the Cheaping, the saint being represented armed, "and a kyng's daughter knelyng a fore hym with a lambe, and the father & the moder beyng in a toure a boven, beholdyng Seint George savyng their daughter from the dragon."

"O myghty God, our all socour celestially,
 Wich this reyme hast given to dower,
 To thi moder, and to me George, proteccion perpetuall,
 Hit to defende from enimies ffere and nere,
 And as this mayden defended was here,
 Bi thy grace from this Dragon devour,
 So, Lorde, preserve this noble prynce and ever be his
 socour."¹

A truly splendid reception for such a young child, who, we will hope, appreciated the "kerchief of ple-

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 231-2. *Leet Book*, f. 221a. It must be remembered that S. George, according to legend, was born at Coventry. See *Seven Champions*. S. George's day is April 23,

saunce," if the drift of the political allusions was above his understanding. True to his policy of ingratiating himself with the burghers and moneyed classes, the king allowed his little son to stand godfather to the mayor's child on this occasion. Nevertheless Edward was not content with mere compliments or protestations of loyalty from the lips of actors, but made this visit of his son an opportunity for strengthening his political position. The mayor and his brethren were called upon to cause the commons of the city to swear an oath of allegiance to the prince of Wales.¹ After this the king and Elizabeth Woodville were all graciousness to the citizens. The queen in September of that year sent twelve bucks from Fakenham Forest as a present to the mayor, his brethren and their wives.² She also praised their "sadde polity, guydyng and diligence" in appeasing an affray, and thanked them warmly for their duties . . . "by you largely shewed vnto vs and to our derrest son the prince; and in like wyse to all oure childern ther in sundry wises hertofore, and namely vnto our right dere son, the Duc of York, in this time of our absens."³ Four years later, Edward sent the prince of Wales with his court to Cheylesmore, where the child sojourned for some time, and was admitted a member of the Trinity and Corpus Christi guilds.⁴

But the fair words of royalty often bore a most unwelcome meaning, and the yoke of the Yorkists was not

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 222.

² *Ib.* f. 224.

³ *Ib.* f. 225a.

⁴ Harl. MS. 6,388 f. 23.

light. Edward, in 1474, applied to "his feythful sub-jetts" in the city of their "benevolence" to aid him with a substantial sum of money for various undertakings incident to a war with France.¹ And seven years later there came a commission for 100 archers to take the field against the Scots.² The king found "benevolences" or forced loans more convenient than subsidies granted by parliament, and in the wars a treaty better served his purpose than a battle, when the French king was willing to pay for peace. The frequent interference of the prince of Wales's council in city disputes at first ruffled the tempers of the great folk at Coventry not a little. "We, your humble and true servants here," the corporation wrote to the prince of Wales in 1480, "know of no variance . . . here but that we among ourselves, be the grace of God shall amicably and righteously settle." But all thoughts of resistance had been abandoned, when the next year a commotion, raised by the common folk at the enclosure of the Lammas pastures, put the franchises in danger of confiscation a second time, and the corporation earnestly entreated the prince of Wales by intercession to avert his father's wrath.

Richard III., in his brief reign, did all that in him lay to conciliate the Coventry folk; in 1485 he kept Whitsuntide at Kenilworth,³ and paid a visit to the city to witness the Corpus Christi pageants, but we hear of no joyous welcome given him by the citizens. Perhaps—

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 226a.

² *Ib.* f. 244.

³ Ramsay, II. 535.

though there was little sentiment in contemporary politics—they could not lightly forget the faces of the two little boys, who had visited the city during their father's lifetime, and had since mysteriously disappeared, men knew not by what means, in the Tower of London. In an interesting letter, written probably in the previous year, the king charges the authorities of this thoroughfare city to provide horses for the royal messengers.

“Forasmoche,” he says, “as we have appointed and ordeined certain of our servants to lye in diverse places and townes betwix us and the west parties of this our royaume for the hasty conveyance of tydings and of all other things for us necessarie to have knowledge of, we therefore wol and desire and also charge you that, if any of our seid servants comyng by you shall nede any horses for thair hasty spede to or from us, ye will see them shortly for to be provided thereof for thair redy money. And also if it fortune any of them to travell from you by night that ye will see that they may have guydes and that they shalbe suffisauntly rewarded for thair labors. And that ye faile not to doo your effectual diligence herein as we trust you, and as we may undrestande the redynesse and good will that ye have to please us.”¹ There is an undertone of threat underlying these last few words, shewing may-be something of the anxiety the king felt concerning the loyalty of the citizens. But the inhabitants were decidedly worth

¹ Corp. MS. A. 79, I. 8. Written from Burton Monastery, April 2.

conciliating, and Richard wrote very cordially in the last year of his reign praising the "sadnesse and circumspect wysdoms" of the mayor and his brethren in allaying debate, and acknowledging their "auctorite to provide, make and establisshe ordenaunces and rules . . . for the vniversall wele and pollytique guiding of" the said city.¹

It seems that this cordiality was wasted on the men of Coventry, so gladly did they welcome king Richard's rival, the victor of Bosworth, when he took up his lodging at the Bull, in Smithford Street, after the battle.² The wardens' accounts record payments made "for brede, ale and wyn and other vitales that was hadde to Maister Onleys, he then beyng mair, at the comyng of Kyng Henry," the most expensive items of the account being "i pype of Claret wyn iii li., i pype of red wyn iii li.," with "xx motons," "ii oxen," and 7 "Stockfishes," the price of which made a total of £4 13s. 6d. It is true that the citizens, with their old supreme indifference to political party, also supplied bread and ale "to the feld of Kyng Richard,"³ and one of their number fought, we know not on which side, at Bosworth, for the accounts record that 2s. 6d. was paid by the Corpus Christi guild "towards the hurt that Thomas Marde-

¹ *Lect Book*, f. 255.

² Fretton, *Mayors*, 12. They presented him with £100 and a cup.

³ *Lect Book*, ff. 257a, 258. It is not quite certain that the words are to be understood as implying that the citizens fed Richard's soldiers.

ford had in the fylde." Two years after Henry kept S. George's feast at Coventry, and also, like his predecessor, saw on S. Peter's day later on in the year (June 29) a performance of the famous mystery plays.

A great council was held at this time in the city, and the archbishop of Canterbury and other bishops read in the minster the papal bulls, affirming Henry's right of succession, and threatening with excommunication all such as should rebel against him.¹ The king was still at Coventry when he heard that the earl of Lincoln, a Yorkist, with help from Burgundy, had landed in Lancashire to support the claim of Lambert Simnel, whom the annals call "the organ-maker's son," but who gave himself out to be the son of the duke of Clarence. After the defeat of the rebels at Stoke, near Newark, Simnel, as all the world knows, became a scullion in the royal kitchen. The annals record that another pretender, Thomas Harrington, who also called himself the son of Clarence, was beheaded in this year "on the conduit by the Bull," and was buried at the Grey Friars.² At the king's second visit at S. Peter's-tide he lodged with Robert Onley, who had been mayor when the battle of Bosworth was fought, and conferred on him the honour of knighthood.³ After Simnel's rising had been crushed, the good folk no doubt expected to enjoy an era of peace, and in the following year the churchwardens of S. Michael's, and other well-

¹ Gairdner, *Henry VII.* 53.

² Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 24.

³ *Ibid.*

disposed people "for joy brought to S. Michael's a great bell, and called it Jesus Bell."¹

Henry's frequent appeals for money must have somewhat lessened the good-will the Coventry men bore him for his frequent visits² and complimentary membership of the city guilds. Echoes reach us of the wars he undertook, which after vast preparations and much ingathering of money, usually ended in a truce or peace. We hear of the depredations of the king of Scots, who in 1496 broke the truce, crossed the border, and after doing all "the harme and crueltee to men, woman, and children . . . that he coulde to th'uttermuch of his power," returned in great haste over Tweed, a crossing which occupied him but six or seven hours, whereas in coming over the river two whole days had been taken up.³ The insult was to be avenged, and two of the most expert men of the city were summoned to meet at a great council to confer upon this matter. The conference naturally ended in a demand for a loan. Henry had in Richard Empson, who succeeded Boteler in the recorder's office, a servant well able to aid him in extorting money from his loyal Coventry subjects. Occasionally, however, this notable calculator made mistakes. Once when a loan was being gathered from among the citizens in 1497, his ignorance of the fact that one Master Richard Smith was "a man of substance" led to his

¹ Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 25.

² He twice visited the city to see the Corpus Christi plays (Sharp, *Mysteries*, 5).

³ Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 17.

making but a small demand upon that worthy's purse, so that others of the city who knew of Smith's wealth were "greatly discouraged" at the inequality of the assessment. Empson was to proceed, said king Henry, as he thought fit, an injunction which may be construed to mean that he was to get all the money he could out of Richard Smith for the king's use.¹

Yet the citizens prospered no doubt under Henry's firm and sagacious rule, and when they recorded his death chronieler-fashion in the *Leet Book*, it is with some appearance of regret. In "this year," the account begins, "dyed king Henry the VIIth, the xxii day of April, . . . at Rochemount . . . and was brought to London in to Pollys² with many nobles of the realme and grete nombre of torches, and a grete nombre of peple both on horsbak and a fote. And after iii dayes beying in Pollys he was brought to Westmynster, and ther he lieth and his quene Elizabeth with him in a newe chapell, which he causid to be made in his lyffe, on whoos saule Jhesu have mercy. And his son kyng Henry the VIIIth was crownyd the same yere at Westmynster the Sondag next after Midsomer day."³

If the father had chastised the men of Coventry with whips, the son was to chastise them with scorpions. Loans and subsidies were the order of the day, for the great treasure gathered together by Henry VII. was quickly dissipated by his successor. In 1524 a hundred

¹ Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 20. ² S. Paul's. ³ *Leet Book*, f. 305.

and ninety-four persons advanced to Henry a hundred and fifty pounds eleven shillings by way of loan,¹ and this is only a single example of what was then a very common arrangement. But the citizens could ill bear the pressure of increased taxation. For some time their prosperity had been waning, for foreign competition had begun to tell upon the English cloth manufacture.² Discontent and divisions were rife among them as in the preceding century. During years of dearth the common lands had been ploughed up, and when the dearth was over—when, “thanks be now to almighty God,” as the *Leet Book* says, “corn is comen to good plente and to easy and reasonable price,” the ploughing was still continued, and the cattle of the common folk deprived of pasture.

In 1525 the citizens rose, after their old practice, to resist the enclosure of the common lands. On “Ill Lammas Day,” say the annals, “. . . the commons of Coventre rose and pulled down the gates and hedges of the grounds inclosed, and they that were in the cittie shutt the Newgate against the chamberlain and their company. The mayor was almost smothered in the throng; he held with the commons, for which he was carried as

¹ Corp. MS. B. 60.

² In Henry VIII.'s reign the woollen manufacture of Norwich was at a low ebb; the principal cause of this was the manufacture abroad, which led to the export of the raw material to Flanders (Burnley, *Hist. of Wool and Wool Combing*, 66-67).

prisoner to London ; he was put out of his office and Mr. John Humphrey served out the year." A special commission under the marquis of Dorset was appointed to try the rioters. Thirty-seven prisoners were sent to Warwick and Kenilworth castles, and seven to the Marshalsea.¹ Some suffered at the pillory, others after long imprisonment were pardoned by the king on the occasion of the pope's jubilee.² But the rulers of the city were highly unpopular, and frequent "slanders" were proclaimed against them.³

The annals record the discovery of the wildest schemes, which sprang, no doubt, from the misery of the people. In 1523 two men, Pratt and Sloth, were arrested in Coventry on the charge of treason. They confessed that their purpose was to kill the mayor and his brethren, rob S. Mary's Hall, where the common chest was kept, and take Kenilworth Castle. They were taken to London for judgment, but executed at Coventry, and their remains figured on the city gates.⁴ The next year a further scheme came to light. This time the king's subsidy was the object at which the plunderers aimed ; it was to be stolen from the collectors on the highway to London ; the conspirators proposed to seize Kenilworth Castle and to fight there for their lives. These men, Phillips, a schoolmaster, Pickering, clerk of the king's larder, and Anthony Manville, gentleman, were hanged, drawn and quartered at Tyburn.⁵

¹ Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 30.

² Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 27.

³ *Ib.* f. 28.

⁴ Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 29a.

⁵ *Ibid.*

The "King's Proceedings" of 1536 undoubtedly intensified the misery of the citizens. The monastery was dissolved by the royal commissioners; the cathedral church defaced and its roof pulled off, and the lead, worth £647, stacked within the desecrated building;¹ the house of the Franciscans razed "because the poor people lay so sore upon it;"² and all monastic property seized into the king's hand. Dugdale, quoting Hales' letter to the protector Somerset, attributes to the dissolution the state of decay and misery into which the city had fallen in the third year of Edward VI. "There were not at that time," the letter runs, "more than 3,000 inhabitants, whereas within memory there had been 15,000."³ It is very doubtful whether the high figure is correct, and certainly the population never sank to so low as 3,000. In a petition coming from the people of Coventry in 1548 it is stated that there were "to the number of eleven to twelve thousand housling people"⁴ within the city. But it was the sweeping and iniquitous act of confiscation, known as the suppression of the guilds and chantries, rather than the dissolution of the monasteries, which brought the citizens to the verge of ruin. So extensive was the house property belonging to the guilds, and so intimately were these bodies connected with the corporation, that this calamity involved the city finances in the most terrible confusion. Having no property from which to draw the money for the annual fee-ferm of £50, one or two persons,

¹ Gasquet, *Monasteries*, II. 427.

² *Ib.* II. 265.

³ Dugdale, *Warw.* I. 146.

⁴ Harl. MS. 6,195, f. 7.

the citizens declared to the protector Somerset, were yearly ruined by the tax levied for its payment.¹ The poorer class—of late years greatly increased in numbers—were deprived of the guild charities, the children of a schoolmaster² and the less wealthy craftsmen of all hope of provision for old age and an honourable burial after death. The burgesses of Lynn and Coventry protested against the confiscation. There were but two churches in the city, the latter declared, “wherein God’s service is done, whereof the one, that is to say, the church of Corpus Christi, was specially maintained of the revenues of such guild lands as had been given heretofore by divers persons to that use. . . . If therefore now by the act the same lands should pass from them, it should be a manifest cause of the utter desolation of the city.” For the people, the petitioners declared, “when the churches were no longer supported, nor God’s service done therein, and the other uses and employments of those lands omitted, should be of force constrained to abandon the city and seek new dwelling places.”³ This energetic protest was not without its effect. The citizens were permitted to purchase back the guild lands for the sum of £1,315 *ls. 8d.*, a very large amount in

¹ Vol. of correspondence, Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 63.

² The schoolmaster’s salary was discharged by the Trinity guild.

³ Harl. MS. 6,195, f. 7. See also Ashley, *pt.* II. 148. The church referred to is the now demolished one dedicated to S. Nicholas, which was supported by the Corpus Christi guild.

those days,¹ which, in spite of their poverty, they were enabled to gather together.

That the great prosperity and glory of Coventry passed away with the Tudor kings is undoubted, just as the special interest in the city's history closes with the Wars of the Roses. A royal visit ceased to be a political event, it became merely an occasion for splendour, or an act of courtesy. Elizabeth visited the city in 1565, and was greeted with much courtier-like compliment by the recorder,² but the reception given to her has none of the significance which attaches to the welcome, say, of Margaret of Anjou. Coventry saw the great queen's rival a few years later, when, in order to be out of reach of her confederates in the north, Mary Queen of Scots was hurriedly conveyed from Tutbury to the city, and placed under a strong guard. But memorable events connected with Coventry grow rarer and rarer as time goes on.

The chief feature of the Stuart period is the strengthening of the Puritan feeling among the citizens. Either owing to the influence of the Presbyterian Cartwright, who, during his tenure of the mastership of Leicester's hospital at Warwick, established his system of church discipline among the clergy of the county,³ or from some hereditary instinct, which had led them to embrace Lollardism under the Lancastrians, and furnish martyrs for the faggot under the Tudors, the men of Coventry grew

¹ Corp. MS. B. 75.

² Poole, *Coventry*, 90.

³ Green, *Hist. Eng. People*, 460.

more Puritan year by year. They greatly vexed the soul of king James in 1611 by refusing to kneel in receiving the Sacrament, a circumstance the English Solomon never forgot, and ten years later he refused to grant a new charter to the city until he was certified by the bishop that the orders of the Church were complied with.¹ Nor did a lawsuit, which the prince of Wales carried on for many years with the corporation about the rent due to him from the monastery lands as lord of Cheylesmore, improve the understanding between the people and the Stuart kings. When, however, the famous writ of ship-money was first issued in 1635, it was not against the principle, but rather against the unfair assessment of the local tax, that the men of Coventry murmured. The city, they complained, was no longer prosperous, nor was it able to pay a sum so disproportionate to that levied on the remainder of the county. Many were the journeys the diligent town clerk, Humphrey Burton, undertook ere he could get the tax lightened for the citizens.²

But no readjustment of the assessment of this unpopular tax could win over the hearts of the Coventry men to king Charles. And when in August, 1642, a few days before the royal standard was unfurled at Nottingham, Charles appeared before the walls and summoned the people of Coventry to admit him, they refused to allow him to enter the city.³ This circumstance rankled sore in the king's mind, and it seems that the feeling

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 18.

² Burton on Ship Money, Corp. MS. A. 35.

³ Poole, *Coventry*, 75.

was shared by his son, for when Charles II. came into his own again, he ordered that the walls of the city where his father had suffered this check should be demolished. The work of destruction, which was begun by the earl of Northampton on July 22, 1662, occupied nearly 500 men for three weeks and three days,¹ and when it was over the history of Coventry as a fortification comes to a close. Moreover, the title of the bishopric was now transposed, running henceforth not Coventry and Lichfield, but Lichfield and Coventry.

King James II., who tampered here as everywhere with the civic constitution in favour of the Tories, his supporters, paid the city a peaceful visit in 1687, and touched for the evil in S. Michael's church, on which occasion "the very galleries crackt again," the throng was so great.² This closes the list of notable royal visits to Coventry, and the interest shifts to the varying fortunes of the citizens. Although, as compared with London, provincial towns ceased to be great centres of trade, Coventry never gave itself wholly up to stagnation and decay, but always kept alive some sort of manufacturing activity. At first the settlement of Huguenot exiles gave an impulse to the silk industry, and for nearly two centuries the weaving of silk and ribbons was the main employment of the citizens. In the eighteenth century the manufacture of watches was introduced,³ but it has been reserved for our own day

¹ Poole, 80. ² Sharp, *Antiq.* 22.

³ Poole, 359-363.

to see the city again put on that busy, eager, thriving look which must have distinguished it under the later Plantagenets. The cycle manufacture has won back for the city some of the prosperity it once enjoyed. But nothing can bring back the pomp and grandeur and the semi-independence of mediæval times; neither can the modern builder lend it any of the consistent beauty of the architecture of the Middle Ages. Still, unlike Abingdon, Winchester, or S. Alban's, it is a town with a present to work in, as well as a past on which to look back. As for the future, who can tell?

XII

THE LAMMAS LANDS

CLOSE by Whitley Bridge is a piece of meadow called Alderford Piece,¹ which is still held by the owners of Whitley abbey, although they have no other land on the Coventry side of the river Sherborne. Concerning this and sundry other meadows² a bitter feud was waged in Coventry during the fifteenth century between the family of Bristowe on the one hand, and the mayor, bailiffs and community of the city on the other. The account of the struggle, which reveals some of the most interesting personalities in Coventry history, shows how tenacious were the memories of the commonalty where the extent of the Lammas lands was concerned, and how fierce their resentment when these suffered diminution by encroachment.

There are doubts whether William Bristowe, of Whitley, came of gentle blood, though he spoke of his manor in those parts, and wrote himself "gentilman" with the best. His father, John Bristowe, had gained his livelihood in the city as a draper, and growing in wealth and

¹ I am indebted for the identification of this piece of land to Mr. Beard, town clerk of Coventry.

² The land in question stretched from Whitley brook to Baron's Field, which was enclosed in 1815 as a cemetery. See map.

influence, became mayor in 1428,¹ and later justice of the peace and master of the Trinity guild. But he left an ill name behind him, and his acts of encroachment were fruitful of many troubles both to him and his descendants.

Thinking may-be to improve his position and step into the ranks of the country gentry, John purchased an estate at Whitley, a mile or two south of the city gates. Then began those enclosures of the common pastures which were hereafter to be remembered against him. Forty years later the tale of his doings were related by the oldest of his fellow-townsmen.² After "the seid John Bristowe had boron office within the cite of Couentre, thynkyng that the common people of the seid cite durst nor wolde contrarie his doying . . . [he] let sowe with corne dyuers landes and buttes lying in the seid comyn grounde of Couentre fastby Whitley Crosse." But the encroachment did not go unnoticed, nor was the transgressor allowed to have his will. "Wherupon" the aged citizens continued glad to remember the stalwart resistance made by a bygone generation, ". . . the seid people of Couentre put the hierdlym³ of bestes of Couentre into the saide corne and eton hit up as corne sownen on their owen common grounde." Nevertheless John did not amend his ways, being assured his good friends, the mayor and corporation, would wink at his misdeeds. But "inordynatly be the fauor of dyuers then officers of the cite of Couentre, dyuers tymes, [he] let inclose parte of the forseid common grounde be

¹ *Lcet Book*, f. 45.

² Corp. MS. F. 4.

³ An obscure word.

diuers parcels, with hegges and dykes, and then aftur dyuers tymes let heire¹ and sowe dyuers of the same closes be hym so wrongfully inclosed, entending euer azeyns all good consiens for his singler avayle² to approwe hym³ of parte of the seid common ground, so that be suche coutynuaunce hit myght be called his owne lande, wher in trouthe he had neuer right, title, nor other possession therin."

But this was not the least of John Bristowe's encroachments. He laid claim to share with the freemen of Coventry the rights of pasture on the side of Whitley brook, nearest to the city,⁴ a claim no lord of Whitley had heretofore advanced. But he met with a second check. "Whiche wrong, when the people of Couentre understode hit, they pynned⁵ the bestes of the seid John Bristowe at Couentre. Wheruppon the same John made amendes for the seid wrong, and never aftur wolde suffer his cattel occupying at Whitley to passe ouer the seid broke toward Couentre be his will." But after his death, when his son William entered into the inheritance, either the relaxation of the citizens' vigilance or the warm friendliness of men in high places enabled the new lord of Whitley to drive his cattle across the brook, the natural boundary between the pasturage of the folk of the hamlet of Whitley and the city of Coventry. More-

¹ Ear=plough.

² Individual profit.

³ Got possession of.

⁴ Perhaps by buying extensive lands outside the city he forfeited his rights of citizenship.

⁵ Put in the pound.

over the meadows between Baron's Field and Whitley brook were kept several. The citizens did not, however, forget these encroachments, though, for many years, custom sanctioned the double wrong.

The fruit of these evil dealings was seen in the year 1469, a troubled one for Coventry. The mayor, William Saunders, a dyer, one of a craft which had often been, and was again often to be, at variance with the corporation, seems to have had leanings towards the popular side. Wars and rumours of wars brought some distress upon the city, and the mayor gave £5 "in relesynge of pore men that shuld have bor their part" towards defraying the cost "for fifty men to go to York to the king against Robin of Redesdale," for Warwick's party were rising in rebellion, and the soldiers, weary of war, demanded the unheard of sum of 10*d.* a day as payment. Financial difficulties also beset the corporation. The ferm, as we have seen, had in the previous year fallen greatly into arrears; but the trouble concerning the Lammas lands was to dwarf by comparison all the rest.

It was at this time that William Bristowe by his own deed, brought down upon himself the anger of the corporation. From a house in the West Orchard he built a wall, which was found to encroach "by a foot or more" upon the common river; wherefore "it was taken up again." Indignant at this usage, Bristowe brought an action for trespass in the county court against the mayor and community. This was an unwise step on his part, for the corporation at once

"remembered," the *Leet Book*¹ says with unconscious irony, "that he was suffered to overlay the common bewixt Whitley and Coventry, and had no common there." In other words, Bristowe had continued to tread in his father's footsteps. They resolved forthwith that this should not be suffered to continue. On the eve of S. Andrew, before Sir John Nedam, knight and justice, they demanded what evidence Bristowe could put forth in support of his claim; and heard the testimony of "agyt" men concerning the impounding of his father's cattle in former days when they had been found in the Coventry pastures. While matters were in debate the other encroachment of this family was brought forward. Men told one another how John Bristowe had, by "dyking and hedging," enclosed "divers parcels" of the common pasture by the water at Whitley, and how the father and son had kept these meadows several ever since.

For once corporation and "commonalty" were of one mind as regards the question of the Lammas lands. It was resolved that John Bristowe's work should be undone. So on the Monday after S. Andrew's day the mayor and divers citizens—such is the account of the affair Bristowe gave in his petition to Edward IV. in the following year²—"stered and provokyd and comaundyd mony and dyuers rotys personys . . . to the number of vc (500) personys and more . . . [who] in manere of warre arrayed, that is for to say [with] byllys, launce-gayes, jakkys, salettys, bowes, arrowes, and with

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 206.

² Corp. MS. F. 3.

mottokys and spadeys, sholles and axes," with evil intent came to Bristowe's fields. Here they went to work, and "caste down his gatys and his dyches, cutte down his hegeys and his trees . . . and mony grete okeys beyng growyng in the hegeys and dycheys of the age of c years and more," carrying away wood, clay and gravel, and "riotously" destroying two "swaneys ereyrs" (nests). The trespassers would even have pulled down the petitioner's mills had not one of his servants induced them to desist by meeting them with a box of money "by way of a fine." And afterwards, Bristowe continued, with a touch of bitterness at this last indignity, "William Pere, oon of the aldermen of the same cite, by the commaundment of the seid late mayre and Richard Braytoft, browght with hym the wayteys of the same cite to the seid riotours in reresyng¹ of their seid rioteys, and like as the[y] hade doon a grete conquest or victori, . . . made theym pype and synge before the said riotours all the weye . . . to the seid cite, which ys by space of a myle largele or more." And that day, the petition goes on yet more bitterly, "these men were in the tavern setting, avauntyng and reresyng of their gret riotes, saying that if your seid besecher² sueyd any persone . . . for that cause by the course of your laweys, that they wold slee³ him." In this manner, with tossing of tankards and playing of pipes, the meadows and arable lands at Whitley were thrown open to the

¹ *i.e.* rehearsing.² *i.e.* petitioner.³ *i.e.* slay.

community at S. Andrew's tide in the year of grace 1469. Two citizens—Pere, an alderman, and Squire, a chamberlain—were afterwards put into possession of the closes to hold them in the name of the community.

William Saunders, the mayor, found the commonalty apt pupils in learning to resent old encroachments; but the pupils soon grew too strong for the master's hand. A fresh trouble arose after Bristowe's claims had been disposed of. The Prior's Waste was held by the convent, but the community was possessed of a somewhat doubtful title to the pasturage of the same. On S. Nicholas' day the people broke out into open riot, threw down hedges round about the Waste and those of other gardens belonging to the convent. The prior professed to be "greatly aggrieved," and proposed to "trouble" the city no doubt with a lawsuit.¹ But the mayor, perceiving perhaps that the matter was one of great difficulty, entreated him to come to terms, and finally granted him as compensation the Waste and a piece of land without the New Gate "to be kept several for evermore." These enclosures were the beginning of troubles. A body of 216 men had approved of this measure, but they were, very likely, selected with a special view to obtaining this approval, as the names of sixty-five of them can be identified with those of past or future municipal officers. At least the common people did not approve of the step. They refused to relinquish their ancient rights over the Prior's Waste and the close by the New Gate, though

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 207.

the leet forbade them to break open the meadows reserved for the prior's use.¹

But Bristowe did not tamely endure to be cut off from his supposed inheritance. He waited till June in the following year, and then by force and arms entered the meadows, which Thomas Squire, the chamberlain, held in the community's name, and wounded Squire, "so that he despaired of his life." And now it was Bristowe's turn to bear off the booty. He carried away from the pastures twenty loads of clay, and the same of sand and of gravel, to the value of 10s., and grass worth 40s.; and committed many depredations which were afterwards brought against him in courts of justice.² Nor was William Pere, holder of the arable land, the delinquent who had summoned the waits from the city to pipe before the rioters, allowed to escape. Judgment came on him in July, before the corn was ripe. Accompanied by one William White, a husbandman, Bristowe came, "*vi et armis*," etc., and took away Pere's goods and chattels to the value of ten marks—that is to say, ten loads of wheat in sheaves—and did other enormities to his damage, value £20.³ Having therefore dealt these blows to his enemies, Bristowe at once appealed to the privy council to redress his wrongs; and Saunders, the late mayor, Pere, and another citizen who had been prominent in the affair of the preceding year, were summoned before the council to answer for the matters laid to their charge.

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 216*α*.

² Corp. MS. Not in catalogue.

³ Corp. MS. E. 9.

The late mayor and his assistants scornfully denied the bulk of Bristowe's accusation. Whitley, they averred, was no "manor," and claims such as its present owner put forward had been formerly unknown. They gently ridiculed the complaint of the damage wrought among the "gret okes," whereof none, they declared, were more than twenty years old, the value of the whole timber being but 6s. 8d.; but they were fain to admit the felling of twelve *small* trees, as well as of breaking hedges, and carrying away sundry loads of clay and gravel. But it was not on Bristowe's land, they declared, that these trespasses had been done. The land he asserted to be part of his inheritance was in reality the property of the community, and in the time of Lawrence Cook (he had succeeded Bristowe's father in the mayoralty in 1429) the corporation had held these meadows in the community's name. And this possession dated back to the days before the city's incorporation. "The commonalty of the same city, afore that any mayor or bailiff was, were seized thereof in their demesne as of fee, time that no man's mind is to the contrary."

Bristowe's second statement, or "replicacion," and Saunders' "rejoinder," were a mere tissue of mutual contradiction, and the king deputed the prior of Maxstoke, Sir Richard Byngham, and Thomas Littleton, to inquire into the business, and "make a return under their conclusions respecting the same, in the quindene of S. Michael next coming."¹ What the end of these

¹ Corp. MS. F. 3.

worthy persons' inquisition was we have no means of knowing. The matter, however, dragged on, with various appeals to justice, until April, 1472.

In that year the corporation made a great effort to end the dispute. A large gathering—"these," says the *Leet Book*, giving about 120 names,¹ "and of other many mo"—assembled in S. Mary's Hall at the mayor's bidding; and being asked "how they wold be demened in that behalf," answered and said, "they wode abyde with the mair and his bredern to the utmost of herr goodes" in the matter; "and as the mair and his cownsaill did in the mater [would] agree thereto." Fortified by this support, the mayor and his council proceeded to seek for means of closing the quarrel by arbitration. On the Wednesday in Whitsunweek the two sheriffs offered to treat on Bristowe's behalf, their labour being undertaken, they confessed, "thorow the speceal meanes and lamentable instaunce of the wiffe of the seid William Bristowe."² The mayor and council, "in order that it might not be said that they had refused a reasonable offer," ordered that bills, "endented and ensealed," should be made, setting forth the matter at variance, both parties agreeing to abide by the decision of John Catesby, sergeant-at-law, and William Cumberland. Moreover, a representative of the mayor and community was to be chosen to ride to London and lay the matter before the arbitrators.³

As there were, of course, no deeds existing testifying

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 215a.

² *Ib.* f. 216.

³ *Ibid.*

to the rights of the community in this case, measures were taken to prepare documents. "And on the Monday next after the blessed Trinity Sunday"¹ the common lands were viewed by certain great men of the neighbourhood, the abbots of Kenilworth, Combe, Stoneley, and Merevale, Sir Simon Mountford of Coleshill, Sir Robert Strelley, and William Hugford of Emscote. These, then, had an "examination" of certain of the oldest men of the city. "The whyche old men all and everych of them by himself deposed and swar openly uppon a boke" that the land in question was "common to the commonalty."² There was then a "letter testimonial" made to this effect, to which all the worshipful men and these great folk affixed their seals.

The thirty old men—their ages ranged from forty years "and more" to fourscore³—were much impressed with the solemnity of the occasion. "In alsmoche," their "letter testimonial" runs, "as for oure gret ages be liklyhode wee may not long abyde in the erthely lyfe, and we knowe verely that hit is medefull to our soweles to witnesse thynges that be true and in oure knowlech, callyng to our remembraunce the unlawefull and wilfull troble whiche William Bristowe dothe azeyns the maire and commonalte of Couentre, claymyng the common ground that lieth betwyxt Baronfelde⁴ withoute

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 216a.

² Corp. MS. F. 4.

³ See Green, *Town Life*, II. 315, for a similar case at Southampton. Here one "ancient" man was aged 101 years and more.

⁴ Baron's Field is now part of the old cemetery.

the Newe Yate under the kynges park, stretchyng to Whitleybroke, called Shirburne," they affirmed that his claim was contrary to old custom, and "open wrong." They told also the tale of John Bristowe's offences in enclosing and sending his cattle upon the pastures.

"And sithen the deth of the seid John Bristowe . . . the same William Bristowe, willyng be his power to contynue the forseid wrong done be his seid ffadir, wrongfully put into the same closez, and the forseid other common grounde residue, dyuers bestes of his ffermors of Whitley, seying presumptuously that he and his tennantez of Whitley wolden haue comyn for their bestes at Whitley withoute nombre" in all places upon the said common grounde. Whereas this land, on the contrary, had formerly been occupied by the commonalty of Coventry "yearly" at their pleasure to make their "shutynges, rennynges, daunsynges, bowelyng aleyes, and other their disportes as in their owne ground. And these matiers," the record concludes, "be us after declared ben iuste and true, so help us God at the day of Dome."

No records remain to tell us what was the ultimate decision at which the arbitrators, Catesby and Cumberland, arrived. In the July of the next year another set of arbitrators were at work, either party of litigants being bound in an obligation of 100 marks to abide by their decision. According to this verdict Bristowe was allowed to retain possession of the enclosed parts, but the mayor and community were to have "common for beasts from Lammas to Candlemas in the said land if

it were fallow, and if it be sown as soon as the corn is carried away," while Bristowe and his heirs were allowed to common with the inhabitants of Coventry on the lands between his estate and the city.¹

It is very probable that the good folk of the city were ill-pleased with this decision, which was of the nature of a compromise; for although they were allowed, as of old, the use of the fields during the autumn and winter months, yet they must, according to the terms of the arbitration, admit Bristowe's cattle to a share in their pastures. And the large flocks, which he kept together with those of the prior, and another grazier, devoured, they said to one another, the pasture which of right belonged to their geldings and cattle. It appears that attempts had been made to break up the Prior's waste and the close by the New Gate, for the leet fixed the penalty of those who should offend in this manner at forty shillings.² Men of long memories must have pointed out to the anxious crowds at Lammas these encroachments on the land of the community. "The people come at Lammas," runs an order of leet for the year 1474, "in excess number and unruly to ill ensauple." And it was ordained that on this day none should accompany the chamberlains, when they rode out into the fields about the city to

¹ Corp. MS. C. 204. The varieties in the nomenclature of the various fields makes it difficult to pronounce decidedly whether Bristowe gained all he desired according to this arbitration.

² *Leet Book*, f. 216.

throw open the common lands, but those to whom permission had been previously given.¹

But those whose minds dwelt on these abuses of encroachment and surcharging with others permitted by the corporation found a spokesman and chief of their party in the dyer, Laurence Saunders. To judge from the position of Laurence and his friends, the heads of this party were men of good standing in the town and well-to-do. They could count among their number brethren of the guild, and men "of substance" sufficient to admit of their filling the lower municipal offices, the warden's post or the chamberlain's. These men had grievances other than the surcharging or enclosing of the common pasture—questions to which Laurence's formal petitions are wholly devoted: their trade was shorn of its profits. In complaints coming from Laurence's followers, we are told that the rulers of the city "picked away the thrift" of the "commonalty"; and reference is made to certain unpopular acts of leet touching the citizens, not only as sharers of the common pasture, but also as makers, buyers, and sellers—in short, as craftsmen.

William Saunders, the father of Laurence, had been mayor in the year the Prior's Waste was enclosed. He must have been a wealthy citizen to rise to the mayor's

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 219. Bristowe's case was again under discussion in 1474, see Corp. MS. D. 2. This time a verdict, given not by a Coventry jury, but—at Bristowe's petition—by a jury of twenty-four knights from the vicinage of the city, was favourable to Bristowe, and acquitted him of the charge of assault, etc., brought against him by the corporation.

degree. Since 1430 the family had lived in Spon Street,¹ a convenient neighbourhood for those of the dyer's occupation, as the river flowed near. If he had been of a submissive temper, in all likelihood Laurence would have risen to high places, as his father had done. Owing perhaps to William Saunders's influence, early in life the son once gave his adherence to the municipality, in so far as, when the question of enclosing the Waste was brought forward, his name appears among the two hundred and sixteen who consented to the measures which, on looking back eleven years later, he unreservedly condemned. It was in 1480 that he was chosen to fill the post of chamberlain or treasurer, and probably from that time, as a member of both the guilds, or as a late municipal officer, he was on the roll of those liable to be summoned by the mayor to attend the council.² The chamberlainship was an irksome post. The officers were overseers of the common pasture, and took fines from the owners of strayed cattle. They received the murage dues, which were devoted to repairing the walls and city buildings, giving in an account of the outlay at the end

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 71a.

² Laurence was a member of the "council of Forty-eight," *Leet Book*, f. 253a, and a member of both guilds (Sharp, *Antiq.* 235; *Leet Book*, f. 278). In 1195 Saunders was discharged from all attendance at the mayor's council, the common council, and all other councils to be taken within the city (*Ib.* f. 275). The common council is first mentioned in 1477. Probably the "Forty-eight" and the common council were identical. The "mayor's council" consisted apparently of such of the "Forty-eight" as he cared to summon. There is no evidence that these councillors were elected by wards.

of the year. The murage money was continually running short about this time, as the prior could not be induced to pay his share, and the chamberlains were frequently called upon to make up the deficit.¹

The corporation quickly found they had reason to repent of their choice. Laurence was a "masterful" man; "where he is subject and servant he would subdue us all if he might get assistance," the mayor complains in a letter written this year to the prince of Wales. The *Leet Book* gives a specimen of the new officer's insubordination.² It appears that labourers had been set to quarry for stone required for repairing the town wall. At the end of the week the two chamberlains, Saunders and his fellow, William Hede, refused, contrary to custom, to give them their wages, Laurence saying "presumptuously" to the mayor that "those that set them awarke shuld pay for hym." The two officers were there and then committed to prison, where they lay for a week. In the end the petitions of their friends obtained a release. Both were, however, bound in £40 to abide by the decision of the mayor and council as to their punishment. The mayor and council fixed upon a fine of £10, and of this they afterwards gave back £6 to the two chamberlains, a piece of liberality which shows that the town rulers knew their cause was weak, or thought it impolitic to push Saunders to extremities while such a strong feeling, in his favour, existed throughout the city.

¹ The prior, in 1498, is said to have refused to pay it for twenty years (*Leet Book*, f. 282). ² *Ib.* f. 234a.

Matters did not improve as time went on. The *Leet Book* relates how Laurence, in spite of the forbearance shown towards him, was "wilfully disposed" against both the mayor and "common people," distraining their cattle and taking "excess" fines for the pound. When summoned before the mayor to "see direction," according to custom, he "many times grudged so to do, and in manner at all times disdained to be led by the said mayor." Finally, on September 20, having obtained licence to leave the city on the plea of business at Southampton, he turned his horse's head in the direction of Ludlow and rode thither, bearing in his hands a petition addressed to the prince of Wales, who, as duke of Cornwall, was the lord and special protector of the city. The prince, a child of ten years old, kept his court at Ludlow Castle, at that time under the guardianship of his uncle, the earl Rivers.

It is very evident that this account of the first falling-out between the chamberlains and the corporation does not go to the root of the matter. Laurence's conduct is more explicable when we turn to the version he gives of the affair in the "Petition of the chamberlains and citizens of Coventry,"¹ for in this document, which he tendered to the prince's council, his finger can be distinctly traced. According to this petition, there were two grievances under which the community then laboured. In the first place the prior, the recorder, Bristowe, and others, withheld from them half of the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 235.

common lands; in the second, a favoured few "maintained" by the recorder and the mayor, "surcharged" the pasture with what number of sheep they chose, while the common folk of the city were not allowed to go beyond their "stint," the number laid down by the authorities. In a city where there was much clothmaking, and wool greatly in request, there was naturally a good deal of scope for the grazier, and no doubt the men of this calling had come to an understanding with the municipality. The chamberlains' duty, however, was perfectly clear. They were enjoined by an order of leet, passed only nine years before, to drive the flocks of those who surcharged the commons to the pound, and take distress from the owners until they should pay the customary fine.¹ This order they accordingly fulfilled, but whether they really asked for what the municipal version calls an "excess" fine there is no means of discovering. But the mayor desired that they should be ruled by his likings and accordingly tried the persuasion of a week's imprisonment. Finding that after their release the chamberlains still persisted in this course, he again and again delivered up the sheep and remitted the fine. Whenever this was done the officers sustained the loss of several shillings, for the charge for every score was fourpence, and there is mention of nine and ten score, and even of 300 sheep driven into the pound. It would seem that in all these

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 207: "Cattle surcharging the common to be driven to the pound and distress taken." And yet this very year the corporation declared to the prior that the citizens always had driven their cattle "without number" on the commons.

matters the mayor was but the tool of the recorder, Harry Boteler, or Butler, who had succeeded to the recordership in 1456, in the room of Thomas Littleton, of famous memory. It was Boteler who, according to the petition, kept Saunders and Hede in prison over the day of the Easter leet, and "wolde in no wyse suffre" them "to speke a worde for the said comown." He, too, urged on them the signing of the recognisance in £40 "to obbeye the meirs commandements" about the pinfold charges, although the chamberlains "grudged" to do so, "in so moche as they were solemply sworn to the contrarie." And from this bond he would not release them, he cried a month later, "for the best pece of scarlet in England." As for the prior's sheep, though four hundred of them were grazing on the common, "contrarie to old custom," the recorder would not suffer them to be pinned, because the prior, forsooth, was "lord of the soil." And when the chamberlains asked that the closes which the prior kept in severalty might be thrown open at Lammas, it was Boteler who refused, alleging the "composition" made between the prior and the community "in the time of William Saunders beying meir."¹

"Wher it ought to be comen as all the body of the city knowen; in that the forseid Laurens, on of the seid Chamberleins, grugged (grudged) insomoche as the seid mair, decessed, was his fadir and myght not answer for hymself, but saide 'that he trusted in God to see hit comen agen.'"

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¹ *Leet Book*, f. 235. The meadows in question were the Prior's Waste and the close by the New Gate. See above, p. 212.

Then the recorder burst forth :

"That he wold make the seid Chamberleyn to curse the tyme that ever he sigh hym and wolde make him to wepe water with his yen,¹ and for to be revenged vppon hym he saide he wolde ryde to complayne vppon him unto our soveraign lorde the Kyng."

The petition ends with a list of the fields enclosed by the prior, the Trinity guild, and others of the city.

It is clear from the recorder's speech that there was expectation of battle toward, and Boteler had no mind to give quarter. Meanwhile Laurence, by his appeal to the prince's council, had stolen a march upon his enemies. A letter, dated September 30, 1480, required that some discreet persons of the city council should ride to Ludlow, bearing a copy of the chamberlain's oath, in order that the prince's council might compose "a variance between certain people of the city about a common pasture." This letter revealed to the corporation the chamberlain's secret mission. "We, your humble and true servants here," the mayor and his brethren wrote in reply, "know no variance betwixt any person here for any common pasture but that we among ourselves, by the grace of God, shall amicably and righteously settle." They begged that Saunders' words might not be "printed in the prince's remembrance," and hoped to have license to punish this troublesome citizen, inasmuch as he would raise up "commotions among the people," and by this means discourage "other misruled to presumptuously

¹ *i.e.* "eyes."

attempt such things hereafter." As the prince still insisted that the suit should be heard at Ludlow, eighteen "worshipful" men, chosen by the common council, set forth on the journey. Among them were numbered the recorder, lately recovered from sickness; the master of the Trinity Guild; John Boteler, town clerk, presumably a son of the recorder; and William Hede, the chamberlain, Laurence's fair-weather friend, who had betimes humbly submitted to the corporation. The wardens, to whom the paying of extraordinary expenses fell, went with the party to pay for the cost of the journey. There was a goodly following of servants, bringing up the number to forty-four persons in all, for the worshipful folk travelled luxuriously, and to secure their comfort a cook and a harbinger were of the company. The cost of the journey—amounting to £15 11s. 11d.—was afterwards, by decree of the mayor and council, discharged by Laurence Saunders. There is nothing related of the proceedings of the case, save that the decision was against Laurence. The *Leet Book* says, as openly was proved, he "entended not reformation, . . . but feyned matiers to th' entent to have be venged for the due punysshement yeven to him for his obstinacy."¹ So he came home to receive "correction," and in his company there came a gentleman of the prince's council to see that he fulfilled all the commands laid upon him. There was nothing for it now but to bow before the storm. In the presence of the mayor, the council, and

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 236a.

divers "commons" assembled in St. Mary's Hall, Laurence, it is said, knelt down and besought the mayor's forgiveness, acknowledging his wrong-doing. He was then committed to ward. After a little time his friends' intercession prevailed, and he was allowed to leave the prison, being bound in £500 to appear at the next quarter sessions. The bond, too—for the corporation were little inclined to allow further complaints to royalty—was to be renewed "till content wer' had" of his "sadde demeanyng."

But though Saunders had been effectually silenced, the strife he had kindled raged on. Bristowe and the prior, whose transgressions in the matter of surcharging were revealed in Laurence's complaint, were both ready to pour forth counter-claims and accusations against the corporation in the hearing of the prince's council, at the time when Saunders' case was still under discussion. Prior Deram being advised to present his grievances in writing to the mayor and his brethren, tendered, on November 16, 1480, an exhaustive list of them,¹ which list the corporation hardly received in a befittingly serious spirit.

Although in the prior's complaint the matter of surcharging is kept somewhat in the background, there can be little doubt that here the real grievance lay. The mayor and his friends had been perhaps very lenient to the convent in this particular until Laurence's petition to the prince had aroused their scruples, and they may

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 237.

have been forced to revive old regulations concerning the "stint." When the prior argued that as "lord of the soil" he was not "admeasurable," but able to drive on to the pasture what number of cattle he chose, the mayor and his brethren feigned blank ignorance. They did not know, they declared, that the prior was "lord of the soil,"¹ but were of opinion that his action would be "disseizin of the commons."² They even tried to shield Laurence Saunders when the prior alleged that his "slanders" were a source of great annoyance to the convent. He had been examined, they affirmed, and declared he never "noised" such lands as were held by the monks to be common, but those he had believed were so "according to the black book of the city"; "but if Laurence had offended," they continued, "he would be pleased to abide by what the mayor and prior chose to command him."

There was another memory that rankled with the monks—the tumult on S. Nicholas' day, 1469, and the subsequent action of William Saunders to prevent the prior from "troubling" the city with a lawsuit. His gardens, Deram indignantly reminded them, and his woods at Whitmoor, had been broken into at that date; and he was not allowed to sue the misdoers at law.

¹ Mayor's reply, *Leet Book*, f. 241.

² In the lord's outwoods, moors, and heaths, which were never under the plough, "he should not be stinted, for the soil is his" (Rogers, *Six Cent.* 90). It is extremely doubtful whether the common lands of Coventry should be included in this category; many of them had been "under the plough."

Again he was met by a front of stolid ignorance. The mayor and community "remembered no such breaking, nor no hindrance to the prior's suit, which he was at liberty to pursue." Grievances Deram had to pour forth in plenty. The town wall was built on his land, he complained, though his payment of £10 for murage, "of pure good will," for repairing the town wall outside his ground entitled him to some consideration in this matter. The folk of the city gave him hourly torment. They broke down his underwood, birches, holly and hawthorn in Whitmoor park, and carried them away; they trod under foot his grass and his corn, damaged his hedges "at their shooting called roving, to his hurt a hundred shillings"; they washed in Swanswell pool, and fished in his ponds "by night and by day," and made his orchard and several grounds a sporting place with shooting and other games, and when "they been challenged by his sergeants they gyven hem short langage, seying that they will have hit their sportynge place." The churchwardens lopped off the boughs of the trees in S. Michael's churchyard, and all manner of filth was deposited in the convent ground, "so that the prior may not have his carriage through his orchard"; while by reason of the refuse swept into the river his mill was "letted to go," and himself and his brethren sorely hurt and discomfited by the stench. At divers times the prior had put up bills against the offenders "in certen sessions, but," he concluded resentfully, "thei ben so supported within this citie and the enquestes so favourable to hem that no reformation nor punysshement hath ben done."

The mayor and community¹ assured the prior in return that they were most anxious to maintain a friendly understanding with the convent. The authorities of the city, they said, "maken dayly als gret diligens as they can to knowe the stoppers of the seid common river, and when eny be perceyved, they ben punysshed after their deserve." As to the breaking of the underwood, every year masters of the crafts, by the command of the mayor, enjoined the members to refrain from this "in eschewyng the doughtfull censures of the Church," and also temporal punishment. But the prior was reminded how "the people of every gret cite as London . . . yerely in somer doon harme to divers lords and gentyles hauyng wods and groves nygh to such citees . . . and yit the lords and gentils suffren sych dedes ofte tymes of their goode will." And if the town wall ran on the prior's land—as it did on other freehold within the city—the convent owed their security to these fortifications, and ought of right to contribute to their erection and repair, "because their lyffeloode within this citie, and their proper Churche may rest in surte be measne of the seid murage." The lopping of trees in the churchyard they laid to the charge of the vicar; while as for the fish in Swanswell pool, they profited by the washing there, and thereby grew "the fatter!" Let the prior, the mayor continued, send in the names of the shooters, trespassers, and the like, and bring an action against them; and take proceedings against the casters

¹ *Leet Book*, ff. 237-241.

of refuse—for they were his own tenants—in his own court leet.

The prior fumed at the audacity of this reply, and still more at the delay in returning it, for more than six weeks had elapsed since his bill of complaint had been issued. His rejoinder¹ was drawn up in two days, a briefer space. The mayor had besought him (not without hypocrisy, to Deram's mind) "that he would be as good to the common weal as his predecessors had been," so that "love and unitee betwixt hym and the cite" might "continue and dayly better encesse"; but he distrusted these professions of peace. "And whereas," he said, "the meire and his brethren prayen hertly to the prior and his convent lovyngly to accept their answeres made to their compleynts, thei think it is (in them) no lovyng desir." "His greves," he reminded them, had been presented in writing "the xvi day of November last past . . . to the which the ii^{de} day of Januar next followyng" they had returned answer: "by the which I and my bredern," the good man went on, lapsing into the first person in the heat and hurry of his sentences, "thinke is no thyng accordyng for reformation, but delayes; wherefore I and they desyre and prey you to have us excused of further comunicacion. . . . For we trust to God in [that] our compleynts ben no feyned matiers, but such as shall be proved be credible proves in writyng." "And for your answeres," he added with a touch of irony, "ye have taken longe leysar to

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 242.

conceyve, suasyous-like (persuasive) as it appereth," they would have none of it, "but we trust to haue other remedye wher trowthe shalbe knowen."

How strangely this dispute sounds in our ears, with its childish display of offended dignity on one side, and half-soothing, half-taunting tone on the other! But the petulant old prior did not long add to the difficulties of the corporation. When John Boteler, the untiring steward, went to London in the following Lent to find out what course the convent meant to pursue with regard to the suit at law between them and the city, he learnt that the enemy was dead.¹ But though the article about surcharging and the minor questions sank into insignificance the dispute about the murage continued for many years, the convent still refusing to pay the tax. At last, in 1498, the matter was set at rest by the bishop's arbitration, the prior paying the annual tax, upon condition that he should in future be made privy to the chamberlains' accounts, in so far as they related to murage.²

But though the prior was dead, and Laurence for the moment quiet, the troubles and litigations in which the corporation was involved were by no means past. On Lammas day, 1481, Bristowe, contrary to the tenor of previous arbitration, refused to allow the chamberlains to enter and throw open his field at Whitley, threatening, if they did so, to sue them for trespass. Immediately the recorder, town-clerk, and others rode to Worcester to

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 243, Boteler.

² Corp. MS. C. 209.



lay the matter before the prince's council.¹ There it was decided that until the prince could appear to adjust the rival claims neither party should enjoy the use of this meadow. Two experts came² by order of the prince's council to examine documents, but Bristowe's were not ready, and after a repetition of the old practice of consulting the oldest inhabitants, the decision was postponed. But the common people could not afford to wait the law's delays. After the departure of the lords of the prince's council, says the *Leet Book*, "divers evell disposed persons in gret nombre of their frowardnesse went to the seid grounde and ther cast down heggs and dikes." Harry Boteler, the recorder, always active when trouble came, went out and bade them "leave off their frowardness." All went back to their work save one, John Tyler, who gave the recorder "forward and unfitting language," and was committed to prison. A riot took place on the Trinity guild feast day, the Decollation of S. John the Baptist, the rioters rang the common bell, and made an attempt to rescue Tyler. Until, the writer of the *Leet Book* says with evident relief, "loued (praised) be God, the meir and dyvers of his brethern came among them and sessed them," Tyler being delivered to the citizens under surety for that time."³

The news of the riot was not long in reaching the ears of the king. He wrote in great wrath, straitly charging

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 246.

² Fineux, one of the prince's council, was deputed to examine the title deeds on behalf of the town, and Catesby on behalf of Bristowe.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 246a.

the mayor and his brethren, as they would avoid "his high displesur" and "entende to enjoye the fraunchises and liberties of the seid cite," to show no favour to the rioters, and to inform "our derrest son," the prince, of the whole proceeding. The mayor and his brethren were in an extremity of terror, remembering the king's high actions and the confiscation of ten years back after Barnet Field. They sent a letter to the prince at Woodstock by the hand of their steward, beseeching him to be a "gracious mean" for them with his royal father, promising speedily to punish the offenders already "endited for riot and trespass." Meanwhile, they laid the cause of the riot at the door of the real offender. "The common peopull her in gret noumbre," they alleged, "thynken that all the defalt is caused be William Bristowe," who had not kept his promise made to the lords of the prince's council with regard to the meadow, nor removed "the bestes of estraunge persones occupiying in his name the seid common."¹ Of Bristowe and his lengthy suit they were well weary. "The people understondon," the mayor writes hopelessly, "that be his longe defferyng, cautels, vexacions and troubles, he wold never have conclucion, but find measne of trouble and vexacion to hurt and disheryte the pore commons her of their rightfull common," which he will do, except the prince aid.

Edward IV. was not altogether satisfied with this humble submission. He complained of conventicles that

¹ Bristowe seems to have allowed his tenants of Whitley to share in his privilege of intercommoning with the people of Coventry. See above, p. 217.

were not suppressed, and evil-doers unpunished, "diners of yowe in maner supposyng them to be supported and fauored be persones hauyng rule in our seid cite."¹ Two of the rioters were ordered to be sent to the king at Woodstock, to to be delivered up to lord Rivers for imprisonment at Ludlow.² One of the two was immediately arrested; another "withdrew himself," but afterwards, as it seems, of his own free will, went off to Ludlow to share the imprisonment of his companion. They were released on the following Easter, and returned to the city.

But this rising had at least the effect of precipitating matters with regard to Bristowe. He appears to have desired the whole affair to be settled according to common law; but as the community had no evidence to support their claims, save the testimony of the aged men of the place, they were most anxious to have the affair arranged "according to composition."³ For five weeks the master of the Trinity guild and John Boteler, the steward,⁴ lingered in London about the business, and even undertook a journey to Southampton, where the king, being informed of Bristowe's "wilfulness," seems to have inclined favourably towards the cause of the citizens. In the August of the following year their stubborn antagonist gave way and consented to abide by the arbitration of the prince of Wales. Boteler accordingly

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 247.

² *Ib.* f. 247a.

³ Disputes concerning the common lands were usually settled by arbitration, and not before the judges of the king's bench, possibly because the "communitas" had no power to sue in law courts as a legal person (Green, *Town Life*, II. 239).

⁴ Boteler filled the post of steward as well as that of town clerk.

hurried off to Ludlow, and a final decision was arrived at in favour, we suppose, of the community; but although such ample details concerning this thirteen-year old dispute are laid before us, nothing is said of the final result.

But although this matter was decided, nothing was done with regard to the other enclosures, and Laurence Saunders became unquiet. He drew up a second list of the meadows that were withheld from the community, and laid it before the mayor and council.¹ It is noteworthy that "Mr." Onley, a member of one of the oldest merchant families within the city, figures in the list as the holder of a "field called Ashmore." The council condescended to explain how and when the enclosures had been made. The *Leet Book* says "they made him privy to the evidence of the city in this behalf." But when Laurence desired a copy of these records to show to "certain people of the city"—old men of his party, no doubt, whose memories reached to bygone times—it was indignantly refused him. The mayor and council would never stoop so low as to furnish all chance comers with the means of cavilling at their proceedings! Then Laurence Saunders burst forth into "untoward" speech, asking to be released from his bond (the £500?), and showing he would not "otherwise be ruled than after his own will." The matter was shown to the lords of the prince's council, then tarrying in Coventry. By their advice Laurence was committed to the "porter's

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 250.

ward" on the Sunday before All-Hallows'; and when, after a week had passed, and he was released "at the great instance" of his friends, it was not without an admonition. The lords told him "that this was the II^{de} tyme he had ben in warde for his disobeysaunce and for commociouns made among the pepull; they bad hym be war, for yf he cam the III^{de} tyme in warde for such matiers, hit shulde cost hym his hedde." The warning was not without its effect. Laurence, for the second time, made a full submission, and also signed a "statute merchant," this time in £200, undertaking that he would be "of good bearing to the mayor and his successors . . . for ever"; and four craftsmen, who dwelt near him in Spon Street,¹ were responsible for his conduct in half this sum. Of the fine of £10, which they exacted from him, half was in course of time to be given back, if his submissive temper showed signs of lasting. It might well be thought he would not again question the high ways of the corporation, for by so doing he might involve his friends in ruin.²

For twelve years there is no record that Saunders ever troubled the peace of men in high places. During this interval death removed his great enemy, the old recorder; and royal favour—for Henry VII. was ever prudent in such matters—gained the vacant post for

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 244.

² It is noticeable that immediately after this the leet gave orders that some of the fields granted to the prior, *i.e.* the field by the New Gate, should be had again "in a perpetual ferm" of the convent.

Richard Empson. In 1484, three years before his death, Boteler was overtaken by a great disgrace. He magnified his own office at the mayor's expense;¹ and, as a punishment, the Forty-eight—with Laurence for the first time on record sitting among the number—decreed that on all public occasions he should not immediately follow the mayor, but should give precedence to the master of the Trinity guild.² It may be that this blow broke the old man's proud spirit. He became "of so gret febulness" that the men of the city, fearing that "any casuale of disease by God's visitation [might] come unto him," began to take into consideration the claims of possible recorders. Boteler, however, kept the post until his death, when the king, hearing how "it had pleased our bleased Creatur to calle late from this vncertain and transorite lif unto his great and inestimable mercy"³ the old recorder, wrote to inquire concerning the candidates for the vacant post.

There are signs that about this time Laurence was looked upon with more favour by those in power.⁴

¹ He said "he had as much power as the mayor, and could arrest him at sessions sitting on the bench" (*Leet Book*, f. 258a).

² Unless he would submit to this condition and to take an oath at Candlemas—as the mayor did—he was to be dismissed. Boteler chose to submit. ³ *Leet Book*, f. 261a.

⁴ The records are very meagre about this time. The fact that Laurence was a member of the Forty-eight is an indication that the corporation were well disposed towards him. The fact that the very same mayor who occasioned Boteler's disgrace enforced certain acts of leet against the bakers is also a proof that there was a change of policy in his time at least (*ib.* f. 253).

In 1494, however, a change of policy, owing perhaps to the influence of the mayor, a grocer, named Robert Green, caused him to take up his old position. In those days the matter of enclosures was but one among many sources of trouble. In the first place, in that same year, the corporation, perhaps suddenly roused to the doings of the various crafts, thought that they had enjoyed in the past few years more liberty than they were disposed to allow. They turned their attention to the pewterers' and tanners' fellowships.¹ Complaint being made concerning "discevable" pewterers' ware, the leet ordained,—“that all such as maken and medle metaillles within this cite, as vessels of brasse, peauter and laten,” should sell true goods, “medled be due proporcion,” and to such merchants as had served an apprenticeship to the craft. Furthermore, the master of the fellowship received orders to seize any faulty vessels and bring them before the mayor and council; the maker, in the event of the charge being proved, was condemned to forfeit the sum of twenty shillings. Then the tanners felt the effects of the energy of the leet. Certain of the craft were wont to buy raw hides “in grate,” with the intention, no doubt, of selling them at a profit. This practice the court forbade, under pain of a forty-shilling fine, to be taken from buyer and seller alike. The irritation these ordinances called forth among certain members of these fellowships can be illustrated from the records of the leet held the following

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 272a.

year. It was then enacted that John Duddesbury, a tanner,¹ and John Smith, a pewterer, for their repeated ill-behaviour to "men of worship," were to be put "under surety from session to session,"² until their submissive behaviour should content the justices of the peace.

A highly unpopular measure was the work of the mayor himself. This ordinance looks simple enough, but there is possibly a deeper meaning underlying it. Before his indentures were made, every apprentice was ordered to pay twelve pence towards the common funds, have his name entered in a book prepared for the purpose by the town clerk, and "swear to the franchises" of the city.³ The apprentices' friends might feel aggrieved at this new exaction; it is less easy to understand why the masters were inclined to resist the measure. That they were so inclined is shown by an order made some six months afterwards to the effect that those who still received apprentices contrary to the ordinance, and continued stubborn, were to be committed to ward and *find surety that they would in future obey all ordinances of leet*.⁴ The

¹ Corp. MS. A. 6. Corpus Christi guild accounts.

² *Leet Book*, f. 276. This order was re-enacted in 1495 (*Ib.* f. 279). No tanner or butcher was "to make conspiracy . . . contrary to this ordinance." Duddesbury had been a member of the Twenty-four, and was mayor in 1505.

³ *Ib.* f. 272a.

⁴ *Ib.* f. 273a. The continuation of this order shows how restive the people were becoming under the recent regulations, a like surety was to be taken from any one who would not obey orders of leet and be reformed by the mayor and council.

corporation had some motive in binding the apprentices by a solemn oath and enrolling them in this methodical fashion; they evidently wished to keep a tight hold on them for some particular purpose. For a hundred years Coventry had been celebrated for clothmaking, and the sellers of cloth had been the richest men in the city, and members of their fellowship more frequently in office than those of any other occupation.¹ It was important that the merchants and drapers—and of these the corporation was chiefly composed—should be able to keep the *makers* of cloth, weavers and fullers, well under control; and in attempting this, quarrels may well have arisen. The merchants, thinking they would again arise, determined to weaken the master-makers of cloth by keeping this tight hold over the apprentices, and making them responsible to the corporation.

Certain practices, in all probability lately revived under this mayor or his successor, were particularly detested by the citizens concerned in clothmaking. Coventry was a great centre for the weaver's industry. For a long time past, in accordance with orders of leet, cloth had been sold on market days in the "Drapery," in St. Michael's churchyard, a house of which the Trinity guild had been possessed for the last 130 years.² There was a second selling place, the porch of St. Michael's church, which lay a few yards from the Drapery door. This had

¹ Lists of all the living craftsmen who had held office were compiled in 1449: 15 drapers, 11 mercers, 7 dyers, 2 wiredrawers, 2 whittawers, and 2 weavers are mentioned (*Ib.* ff. 144-148).

² Drapery granted to the Trinity guild 1365-9 (Sharp, 131).

been in all probability the traditional sale ground for cloth before the Drapery was fixed on and passed into the possession of the guild. In the church porch the payment of stallage might be avoided, and it may be the makers did not fear for their workmanship the strict supervision of the craft of drapers. In 1456 the sale of cloth in the porch was forbidden by the leet;¹ yet no doubt, in spite of pains and penalties, the weavers or makers still drove their bargains, whenever it was possible, outside the walls of the Drapery. But the municipality resolved that the orders of leet should no longer be set at nought; cloth must henceforward be sold in the Drapery,² and not elsewhere.

There was also a fixed place for the weighing and sale of wool, called the Wool-hall, adjoining the Drapery, and likewise the property of the guild.³ The trade in wool was, no doubt, chiefly in the hands of the wealthy merchants, many of whom were "of the Staple of Calais." The wardens also overlooked the weighing, and took from the owners certain dues "for the profit of the town."⁴ These dues must have increased the price of wool, so that the weavers or clothmakers—or whatever body of men purchased the wool for manufacture in the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 166.

² These words are almost identical with a gloss, written in the margin of one ordinance passed in 1495. For the profits arising from the Nottingham Drapery, see *Nottingham Rec.* III. 62.

³ Corp. MS. B. 75.

⁴ *Leet Book*, ff. 99, 101. These orders were passed in 1439.

first instance¹—suffered by reason of these regulations, and poor householders who bought the wool to weave for their own use were in like case. The enforcement of these orders² and the consequent collection of dues were bitterly resented, and the citizens, reminded of the traditional “toll freedom” of their market, cried that the city that had been free was now in bondage.

Dame goode Eve³ made us fre,
But now the custom for wol and the draperie.

But before Green's year of mayoralty was past, the corporation found that they would still have to reckon with Laurence Saunders. It was on Lammas day, 1494, in the presence—so the mayor and council were “credibly informed”—of forty persons, that he spoke these words: “Sirs, her me! we shall never have our rights till we have striken of III or IIII of thes churls heds that rulen us, and if thereafter hit be asked who did that dede, hit shalbe seid, me and they, and they and me.” “He shuld constreyn,” Laurence went on, “William Boteler to drive his cart laden with ots into the Croschepyng,

¹ In Coventry the wool buyers appear to have been the cloth-makers. The dyers in 1415, who were “great makers of cloth,” took “the flower of the wool” for their own use (*Rot. Parl.* IV. 75). In 1436 we hear of the clothmakers employing combers to card wool (*Leet Book*, f. 89), and in 1512 we find that certain searchers were appointed to see that the wool was free from filth for the clothier (*Ib.* f. 312a).

² There are no *new* ordinances relating to the weighing of wool at this time. Most likely the ordinances of 1439 were often evaded, and it was resolved that a stricter supervision should be exercised.

³ *i.e.* Godiva.

and ther to unlade the seid cart." Now, William Boteler was either a forestaller and regrater, who intercepted, in defiance of all manner of ordinances to the contrary, the grain intended to be sold openly in the market, or he had encroached upon the common land. Laurence, it appears, fulfilled his threat, and cried out to the crowd assembled in the Cross Cheaping or market place: "Come, sirs, and take the corn who so wull, as youre owne."¹ The whole proceeding utterly scandalised the mayor and his worshipful brethren. On the "Wednesday after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross" they committed Laurence to prison, and fixed his fine at £40. For seven months he lay there, and two friends belonging to his own craft,² brethren of the Corpus Christi guild, were surety for the payment of this great sum. But this amount meant ruin, and drove Laurence's party to fury. The mayor and council had treated a fellow-citizen no better than one of those hated Scots. And this was not enough. They also bound over this sower of strife "to good bearing," and the next year, whether for the sake of old offences or for the commission of new ones, wiped out his name from among the number of the "brethren of the mayor." Laurence Saunders was "discharged," the order ran, "from the mayor's council, the common council, and all other coun-

¹ Laurence afterwards committed William Boteler to ward for breach of regulations of leet doubtless, but "without authority."

² Alexander Horsley and Robert Barlow (Corpus Christi guild accounts, Corp. MS. A. 6, f. 5).

cils to be taken and kept within this city for the welfare of the same," and forbidden under the penalty of £40 ever to ride out with the chamberlains on Lammas day.¹

It was an old custom in Coventry to nail up all announcements, which for obvious reasons no crier would consent to proclaim, on the church door, where all might read them. It was in this manner that friar John Bredon, on the occasion of a dispute between his order and the monks, some forty years back, appealed to the citizens to throw off the dominion of the prior, as "the thraldom of Pharaoh." So within eight days after Lammas, 1495, some unknown rhymester of the "commonalty" nailed up some verses of his making on the north door of St. Michael's church; forgetting in them neither the oppressive acts which had been lately passed nor the punishment visited on Laurence for the tumult of the preceding year.²

Be it knowen & understand,
This cite shulde be free and nowe is bonde,
Dame goode Eve made hit free,
& now the custom for woll & the draperie.
Also hit is made that no prentis shalbe
But xiii penyes pay shulde he
That act did Robert Grene,
Therefor he had many a curse, I wene.
And now a nother rule ȝe do make
That none shall ride at lamas but they that ȝe take
When our ale is Tunned
Ȝe shall have drynk to your cake.

¹ *Lect Book*, f. 275.

² *Ib.* f. 275a. One of the pieces of "civic poetry" quoted by Sharp, 235.

The final lines recall the heavy fine to be paid by Saunders:

Ye have put on man like a Scot to ransaun,
That wol be remembred when ye have all forgote. Caviat.¹

It may be that, in the face of this wrathful discontent—it was just at this time that the ill-behaviour of John Smith and John Duddesbury to “men of worship” caused the offenders to be watched so closely—the corporation felt some anxiety. At least they thought it prudent to relieve Laurence of the payment of half of the fine they had laid upon him. Of the remaining sum half was paid by the sureties, but £10 was yet due, and in 1496 Saunders appealed to the king. The fruit of his solicitings was a privy seal, addressed to the mayor and sheriffs asking them in charity to take £10 and remit the rest of the fine, as Laurence was now old and fallen into poverty.² There was one sentence in the letter very little to the recipients’ liking. The king ordered the mayor “to do right” in a variance concerning a common pasture which Laurence had informed his grace to be in the city; “where,” as the “men of worship” declared with righteous anger, “no such variance was.” It would be folly indeed to smooth the lot of Laurence Saunders or release his friends from their bond. So the great culprit having paid £10 and his sureties a like sum, matters must be set right at Court,

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 235.

² *Leet Book*, f. 277a; Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 14. The poverty from which Laurence suffered now had probably not afflicted him earlier in his career.

and the appeals of Laurence and his party made of no effect. So a "writing of the great and many offences of the said Laurence" was sent to Master Richard Empson, who was then in London, to be laid before the king. The mayor and his fellows awaited meanwhile the issue of the recorder's mediation.

Laurence Saunders, too, had his hopes of Court. "As for Mr. Recorder," he said confidently a little later, "I have reckoned with him before the king, and he shall be easy enough." Meanwhile Lammas time was approaching, and he looked for some great movement against the corporation, which that season should bring forth. So he went into the house of the mayor, John Dove, and said: "Mister mair, I advise yowe loke wisely on yourself, for on lamasse day ye shall her other tythyngs, ffor many of these catifes that loke so hy nowe shall be brought lower; and ye knowe wele amongst yowe ye have of myn x li: of money, which I dought not I shall have ayen on lamasse day, or elles III or IIII of the best of yowe shall smart. Therfor I advise yowe, ber upright the swerd at your perill, for ye shall knowe mor shortly."

That allusion to the mayor's sword carried a sting. A century ago, Richard II. had ordered it to be borne *behind* John Deister, the mayor, rather than before him as the custom was, "*because he did not do justice.*" It may be John Dove was secretly afraid. Had he done justice continually? What if the king should visit Laurence with his favour now? Though this man made so light of the mayor's dignity, he was not punished; but all waited for the news from London.

On July 20 Laurence determined to justify his position by putting in his petition of grievances for the third time. He laid before the mayor a list of the enclosed common lands, drawn up from inquiries made among old men of the city the year of his chamberlainship. He asked that the bill might be read aloud in open court, for the sessions of the peace were then proceeding. John Dove was not prepared to do this. It was not a matter to be determined in that court, and besides, he understood that it required no haste. Saunders might come and have his answer on the morrow by nine of the clock. On hearing this the old taunt sprang to Laurence's lips, "Maister meir," he said aloud in the assembly, "hold upright your swerde"; and after expressing his hope of "reckoning with Mr. Recorder," he left John Dove to recover his dignity.

As far as we can tell, Saunders's hour of triumph never came, for there was no rising at Lammas; but soon after the scandal at the sessions came a letter from the king, giving the mayor and council full permission to deal with the rebel "after the good and laudable custom of the city." This permission must have afforded them untold relief. As Laurence refused to give any pledge as to his future conduct, they committed him to prison. But he never rested, nor did his friends give up the battle. They interceded at Court, this time with Thomas Savage, the bishop of Rochester,¹ and it seemed

¹ It is noticeable that this bishop sympathized with the unruly people of York. See Miss Sellers, *The City of York in the Sixteenth Century* in *Eng. Hist. Rev.* ix. 275.

that their intercession was likely to bear fruit, for letters arrived to the effect that Laurence should be set free to plead his cause before the king at Woodstock. But the mayor and council would not let him go, for he offered, to their thinking, insufficient surety, letting fall also many seditious words, which are recorded in the Book of Council, and saying, "he wold fynd no other surety what so ever fell theruppon." Wherefore, the *Leet Book* says, he remained in prison.

Two "seditious bills"—one nailed on the minster door on S. Anne's Day—show how strained the situation was becoming. If ever, during a century and a half, the rule of the Coventry guilds had been as thoroughly detested as now, the feeling had never been put in words that have come down to us with such unmistakable force. Of these attacks, the second has a much loftier tone. After a passing reference to Laurence, lying in prison—

Ye have hunted the hare,
Ye hold him in a snare—

there come, in the first set of verses, a warning to all the great folk that have forgotten to rule justly:

Ye that be of myght,
Se that ye do right,
Thynk on your othe;
For wher that ye do wrong,
Ye shall mend hit among,
Though ye be never so loth.

The poet and his friends—he says in the second set of verses—show outward respect to their rulers, but their minds are full of bitterness:

This cyte is bond thad shuld be fre,
 The right is holden fro the commonalte;
 Our comens that at lamas open shuld be cast
 They be closed in & hegged full fast,
 And he that speketh for our right is in the hall,¹
 And that is shame for yowe & for us all;
 You can not denygh hit but he is your brother;
 & to bothe Gilds he hath paid asmoch as another.

As for the "commonalty," they have no more to lose, the verse goes on to say:—

For eny favour or frenship the commons with yowe fynde,
 But pyke away our thryfte & make us all blynde;
 And ever ye have nede to the commonalte,
 Such favour as ye shewe us, such shall ye see.
 We may speke feir & bid you goode morowe,
 But luff with our herts shull ye hav never.
 Cherish the commonalte & se that they have ther right,
 For drede of a worse chaunce be day or be nyght,
 The best of you all litell worth shuld be,
 And ye had not help of the commonalte.²

Matters remained for some time at a standstill; then at last, early in November, Laurence's "labour and busy suit" brought two privy seals, containing full directions, to Coventry.³ The mayor was required to release the prisoner after taking surety in £100, so that he might appear at Westminster and state his case; while two or three of the city council, sufficiently instructed in the matters to be laid to his charge, were to bear him company. At a meeting of the council on November 14, certain citizens, among whom was John Boteler the

¹ i.e. in prison.

² *Leet Book*, f. 278. The MS. has *co'iens* and *co'ialte* throughout. Both sets printed in Sharp, pp. 235-6.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 278.

steward, were appointed to ride to London. There, joined by the recorder and others of the city, who no doubt had already entered on various negotiations connected with this suit, they were to lay an account of Laurence's "demeasnyng" before the king. Another privy seal had been received, addressed to four friends¹ of Laurence, who were summoned to London "to th' entent that they shuld testyfie with hym in such matters as he wold allege for his greves." And now the business went quickly forward. "The appoyntement was kept," says the *Leet Book*, "befor the Kyngs Councell in the Sterr Chambr the Friday next after Seynt Martyn day, and ther continied dayly vnto the Tewesday next befor the fest of Seynt Andrew . . . at which day befor my lords of Caunterbury, London and Rochester, chief Justice Mr. ffyneux, and many other lords, the hole matier was hard at large, both the compleynt of the seid Laurence, and the answer therunto, the replicaciō of the seid Laurence, and the rejoynder theruppon, with the deposicions of the witnesses, and preves of the seid Laurence, wheruppon the seid Laurence was ther and then comyt vnto the Flete, unto the tyme the kyngs pleasur was knowen."

So Laurence Saunders vanished into the Fleet, while Boteler and the rest returned in triumph to Coventry. The corporation remained clearly masters of the field.

¹ One of these, William Huet, probably a tailor or shereman, was one of the nine score wealthy men. In 1464, he—or one bearing this name—had been in trouble with the corporation (*v. ante*, p. 125). "Norfolk," the name of one other, was a regular *weaver's* name in Coventry.

In a privy seal,¹ received by the mayor and sheriffs the next December, Laurence's complaints were pronounced "feined and contrived," and himself a "seditioux" man, who had "of his gret presumpcion and obstinacie not seldom but often tymes disobeyed the liefell . . . precepts of you the said mair . . . to the right evil and pernitioux example, and therby embolded and encouraged other to offende in like wise." But the king willed that the landable and prosperous governance of the city should not "surcease or bee sette aparte by the sinistre or crafte meanes of any privat personne," and so the folk of the city were commanded "for the *pretence of any right hereafter by thaim . . . to bee claimed*" to make no conspiracies and unlawful assemblies.

As for the details of the trial, of them we know nothing.² Boteler kept the complaint and the answer, the replication and the rejoinder, in papers, "the tenor whereof," says the *Leet Book*, "her ensueth . . ." but just at this place occurs an unlucky break. The careful and zealous town clerk was called away, no doubt, at that moment on business of the first importance; there are no further entries made; so there can be nothing told of the trial in the Star Chamber that Martinmas and of the long agony of Laurence Saunders.

¹ Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 19.

² I am afraid that there is nothing further to be learned of Saunders. Professor S. R. Gardiner was so good as to make inquiries at the Record Office whether there were any Star Chamber records bearing upon his case, but none belonging to this period are in existence.

CHAPTER XIII

THE COMPANIES OF THE CRAFTS

THE men of Coventry, a city which, in later mediæval times, stood fourth among the wealthy towns of England,¹ gained a livelihood by the buying and selling of wool and the making of cloth.² As early as 1398 the traffic in the frieze of Coventry³ extended beyond the modest limits of the city itself. In that year two hundred pounds' worth, the export of one merchant, lay in the port of distant Stralsund, on the Baltic coast,⁴ and in London and other places the cloth was in great request during the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁵

For over a hundred years Coventry held a very prominent position among the clothmaking towns of England. But about 1518 there was great depression in the local industry. The weavers and fullers were crying out for work, and the city was brought to the verge of desolation. We cannot tell with any certainty the reason of this decay, but suspect that foreign competition lies at

¹ Rogers, *Six Cent.* I. 116.

² Previous to 1320 there was a special place in the market assigned to the sale of cloth. See *undated* deed Corp. MS. C. 40.

³ *Rot. Parl.* III. 437.

⁴ *Litteræ Cantuarienses* (Rolls Series, 85), III. 81.

⁵ *Leet Book*, f. 322a (1518).

the root of the matter.¹ Kindred trades also underwent a like vicissitude. Thus the making of blue thread, whereof there had once been "great and common merchandise"² in the city, was abandoned before the time of Edward VI. "The chiefest trade of Coventry," said one of the writers of that day, "was heretofore in making blue thread, and then the town was rich, even upon that trade only,"³ but he goes on to say how some material from "beyond seas" had driven the Coventry wares from the market. The cappers also, who took their place as a flourishing and exclusive craft at the end of the fifteenth century, found that a change in the fashion brought poverty upon them in the days of Elizabeth.⁴ And the city, indeed, never completely regained its old position.

The men of mediæval Coventry naturally attached great importance to the maintenance and extension of the cloth trade in view of the wealth it brought. Special buildings were set apart for the staple traffic of the city. The Drapery and the Wool-hall, both in Bayley Lane, under the shadow of S. Michael's church, were the re-

¹ Burnley, *Hist. Wool and Wool-combing*, 66-7.

² In 1415. *Rot. Parl.* IV. 75.

³ John Hales in the *Common Weal of the Realm* (ed. Lamond) 128. In the cloth trade the story is a similar one. In 1485 and 1495 the aulnage of Coventry and district was £23; that of Worcester and Hereford £13. In 1552 Worcester was a more important centre than Coventry (*Ib.* 77, note).

⁴ Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* pt. II. 95. A new fashion under Elizabeth of wearing "hats and felts" seriously affected the makers woollen caps.

cognised selling places for the raw and finished material; and a small illicit market went on in the porch of the church itself.¹ Hard by stood the Searching-house, a place devoted to the examination of all the cloth made by the city workpeople. Two weavers and two fullers, specially appointed for the purpose, overlooked the handiwork of their fellow-craftsmen; while six drapers were appointed to superintend these weavers and fullers, so as to guard against any exhibition of partiality or slackness in the execution of the task. If the material were sufficiently fullered and well woven, the city seal was attached to it in token of its genuine quality; but the searchers were straitly charged to warrant no piece that fell short of the standard excellence, and bad wares were returned to the owner to make therewith as good a bargain as he could.²

An order of leet passed in 1518 gives very precise directions for the searching process.

“Hit is to be had in mynde that for a trueth of cloth-makyng to be had in this cite as foloeth, if it myght be folowed, and the execucion of the same to be don shortly, or els the cite wolbe so fer past that it wolbe past remedie to be recouered to eny welth or prosperite, hit is thought hit were good to have ij wevers & ij walkers sworn to make true serche of the wevers doying & also of the walkers & to present the trueth; and also to be chosen vj

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 166. See above, pp. 241-2.

² *Ib.* f. 322a. The system was also applied to the cappers, who chose two from among their number as overlookers (*Ib.* f. 325).

drapers to be maisters, & ouerseers of the doying of the serchers, that if some of them cannot a lesour to be at the serchyng at the dayes of the serchers, yet some of these vj maisters schall euer be ther. And by cause it were to great a besynes for the serchers to go to every mannes house, hit is enacted at this lete to haue a howse of the gilde,¹ or of some other mannes nyghe the drapery doore, to be ordeyned well with perches to drawe ouer the clothes when they be thykked, and also weightes & ballaunce to wey the cloth, and when it cometh frome the walkers, the walkers to bryng it to the serchyng house, and to serche it, & to se it ouer a perche, and if it be good cloth as it owght to be in brede & lengh, that the cite may have a preise by hit & no sklauder, then to sett upon hit the Olyvaunt in lede,² and of the bak of the seall the lengh of the cloth, by the which men shall perceyve and see it is true Coventre cloth, ffor of suerte ther is in London & other places that sell false & untrew made cloth, & name hit Couentre cloth, the which is a gret slauder to the cite than it deserveth by a gret partie. And if ther be eny man that hath eny cloth brought to the serchyng house, what degre so ever he be of, if it be not able for the worschip of the cite to be let passe, let hym pay for the serche & lett hym do his best with hit, but set not the Olyvaunt upon it. And this serche to be made also this fourme,³ that is to sey ij days in the weke, Tewesday &

¹ *i.e.* the Trinity guild.

² The elephant, *i.e.* the city seal, which bears the device of an elephant and castle.

³ *Lett Book*, f. 323. This system did not by any means insure

Saturday, and ij of the serchers to be ther from viij of the klok to a xi, and frome on to iiij of the klok; and a sealer to be ordeyned & sworne to stryke the cloth and seale hit, and wrete hit, and fynde leed, & to have a peny for his labor; and the sealles to be put in a cofre with ij keys, the master of the vj drapers to have the on, and the serchers the other, and for the serche of every cloth to the serchers to have j d. and it is to be thought every good man schal be gladde of that payment."

The person who consistently reaped the greatest benefit from this activity was the draper, the merchant of cloth. Within the city his fellowship ranked next to that of the mercers, or merchants proper, who traded in wool as members of the Staple of Calais, or trafficked in wine and wax, which they brought in barges from Bristol.¹ None but the well-to-do could enter into the ranks of the drapers' craft.² Some of its more fortunate brethren were able to purchase estates and take rank among the county gentry. Thus John Bristowe, draper, sometime mayor and justice of the peace in Coventry, became possessed of land

good workmanship. It was noted in the middle of the century that when the make of cloth deteriorated, the cloth-making towns still set the seal upon the material, "and so abased the credit of their predecessors to their singular luker" (Lamond, *Common Weal*, 77).

¹ *Rot. Parl.* V. 569. There is a petition concerning the hindrance of the navigation of the river Severn; Coventry, among other towns, is spoken of as being injured thereby.

² The mercers' and drapers' apprentices were compelled to pay the admission fines on the sealing of their indentures, whereas in other fraternities these were not demanded until the period of apprenticeship was past (*Leet Book*, f. 322).

at Whitley; and his son William spoke of his "manor" in those parts, and frequently described himself as a "gentleman." And John, grandson of Julian Nethermill, a city dignitary of the same craft, held lands in Exhall, and had his arms blazoned among those of the great county folk.¹ Many members of this fellowship have left a name showing the great power for good or ill that they possessed within the city. There was John Britowe, mayor in the early fifteenth century, who, as the oldest inhabitants declared, "after he had boron office within the cite of Couentre thynkyng that the common people of the seid cite durst nor wolde contrarie his doying, claymed unlawfully" to have certain rights over the common pasture. John Haddon, another draper-mayor, has left a better reputation; it was he who came to the rescue of the poverty-stricken clothiers of the city in 1518,² and by a timely loan enabled them to continue work. While John Bond, who, as his epitaph declares, gave "divers lands and tenements for the maintenance of ten poore men, as long as the world shall endure," is yet remembered as the founder of the Bablake hospital.

The near connection between these great cloth merchants and the corporation is one of the most striking features of municipal life in Coventry during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The marks of the drapers' influence in civic affairs are continually before our eyes. It was in a draper's mayoralty that ordinances

¹ *Warw. Antiq. Mag.* pt. VI. 110.

² *Leet Book*, f. 323.

were first made respecting the searching of cloth.¹ And when the system of overlooking was perfected in 1518, a few years later, it was to six men of this craft that the task of superintending the searchers' investigations was assigned. Just as, about a hundred years before that time, when an unsuccessful attempt was made by the town rulers to exercise complete control over the dyers' craft, it was suggested that two drapers as well as two dyers, in either case nominees of the corporation, should keep watch over the dyers' movements, and "present" them for any "fault or confederacy" at the court of the mayor.²

Measures framed by this body in the interest of any particular craft or class were doubtless found oppressive by those who had no lot or part in their enactment. Thus while the yea or nay of the fullers had little weight in municipal councils, the wealth of the drapers gave them a control over the local trade to an extent which we can hardly realise. The reason of this supremacy is not far to seek. The mercers and drapers in their character of wealthy men usually occupied the principal official posts in the city.³ No one, unless he were possessed of a certain amount of wealth, could rise to a high place in the corporation. Men were ranked according to the amount of property in their possession, and to speak of a citizen as

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 314.

² *Rot. Parl.* IV. 75. I am indebted for the explanation of the significance of this petition to parliament against the dyers to Mrs. J. R. Green.

³ The terms "degree of a mayor—of a bailiff" were used in

“of the degree of a mayor” or “bailiff,” conveyed as definite an idea as the assertion that “So-and-so has a fortune of £20,000 or £30,000” would convey to our minds at the present date.

The traders were thus enabled to rule the craft companies with an iron hand; and the crafts were on the whole fairly submissive, for they stood alone. Each fellowship, with a few exceptions, formed a distinct body, and could rely for no support on any large and all-embracing brotherhood of which they were members, for though individual craftsmen might belong to the Trinity and Corpus Christi guilds, they formed among themselves no united body. There was in Coventry, as far as I know, no “merchant guild” in the shape of an “aggregate of all the crafts,” into which comprehensive society, according to the theory of Dr. Gross, the merchant guild during the fifteenth century had a tendency to “resolve itself.” In citing a certain “counsell of all the fellowship of the crafts” as an illustration of this tendency, the historian of the *Gilda Mercatoria* has, I venture to think, been misled by the ambiguous wording of the rules drawn up by the pinners, tilers, and

assessing fines. In the year 1449 a list of the craftsfolk of the city enables us to find out to what calling the members of the corporation belonged (*Leet Book*, ff. 144-9). On January 25, 1447, the twenty-four (the mayor’s council) met to elect the officials for the ensuing year. The occupation of four of these men I cannot identify. Three were craftsmen, *i.e.* two dyers and a whittawer, and the remaining seventeen were either drapers or mercers who had previously filled either the mayor’s post or the bailiff’s (*Leet Book*, f. 132).

coopers, copied in the diary of Humphrey Wanley.¹ This association was one in which these three mysteries (and these only) were included, and for very practical reasons; the pinners, tilers, and coopers, being neither rich nor numerous, could only when united support the burden of furnishing a pageant at the Corpus Christi festival.² Many of the fifteen brethren of the united crafts, whose names are mentioned in Wanley's "Diary," can be identified with pinners, tilers, or coopers living in 1475 within the city, and beyond a doubt they all belonged to one or other of these fellowships. Indeed, the only occasion on which John Goodknabuff, the cooper, supposed master of all the craft fraternities within the city, including necessarily the affluent companies of the drapers, dyers, and mercers, was summoned to St. Mary's Hall to be consulted on any municipal question was in

¹ Gross, I. 123, and II. 51; Harl. MS. 6,466, ff. 5, 6, cited by Gross, II. 51. The matter is capable of refutation in detail. This "general fellowship" consisted *exclusively* of pinners, tilers, and coopers. John Goodknabuff, or Godeknave, the master of the fellowship, was a cooper, and is mentioned in the *Leet Book* as belonging to that calling. He was a man of no standing whatever, and was never, as far as I know, employed in any municipal office. John Swift, one of Godeknave's "fellows," presumably one of the three keepers of the three united crafts, Godeknave having the precedence, may have been a son of William Swift, mentioned among the twelve pinners and tilers in a list composed in 1449 (*Leet Book*, f. 147a).

² *Uf.* the fellowship of the cardmarkers, saddlers, masons and painters. Of this fraternity it was said (1444) "they be long tyme ypast have byn as oone fellauship in beryng costys, charges, and all other dueties of old tyme to ther pagent" (*Leet Book*, f. 109).

1472, when his name occurs in a list of 180 persons who gave a tumultuous approval to the action of the mayor and his brethren in a dispute concerning the common pasture.¹ It is not in the nature of things to suppose that a great and wealthy fraternity, such as the drapers, accustomed to exercise authority in civic affairs, would consent to be associated in a body, exercising the functions of the ancient merchant guild, but presided over by citizens so poor and unimportant as John Godeknave, the cooper, and John Swift, the tiler. All our evidence goes to prove that the functions of the merchant guild were exercised by the corporation, a self-elected body chiefly composed of the richest traders of the city.

This body of wealthy merchants, in whose hands was vested all control over the city trade, could and did make and unmake regulations of the deepest significance to the various crafts. By an ordinance of the city leet they could completely alter the conditions regulating the work of salesmen or artificers, as they had an absolute control over all workers, since by the craft system all who practised the same calling were compelled to obey the same regulations. Nominally the regulations were drawn up by the crafts. In reality, as certain members of the corporation overlooked them, amending and annulling at their pleasure, this power of the crafts was held at the will of the municipal rulers.² And the corporation did

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 215a.

² *Leet Book*, f. 4a. The mayor, recorder, and bailiffs were to take eight or twelve of the general council of the city, and to summon before them the wardens of the crafts with their ordin-

not let their power lie idle. In the interests of the general public they forced the crafts to embody in their rules the ordinances framed by the court leet. Thus the weavers were compelled to bring the cloth they had woven to be measured and examined by the searcher,¹ the fullers to adopt the custom of using a special mark whereby the work of every individual craftsman could be recognised and known,² the dyers to abstain from using a certain French dye of inferior consistency,³ and, much against the wills of this community, to admit another member into their craft.⁴ It was not only as regards the working of their cloth, but in all other matters the crafts had to bow before the will of the corporation. Any special courts framed for the purpose of punishing those who disobeyed the ordinances of the fellowship were looked coldly on by the municipal rulers, and when possible suppressed. In 1518 the mysteries were compelled to make the mayor the arbiter of all cases of dispute between offenders and the wardens of their respective fellowships. If anyone committed a fault against the fellowship, he must be asked to pay a "reasonable" penalty, and "if he deny and will not pay . . . according to the ordinance . . . within three or

ances, and these "poynts that byn lawfull, good and honest for the cite be alowyd hem and all other throwasid [*sic*], and had fer none." And this order was in substance repeated many times (*Ib.* f. 90a). ¹ *Leet Book*, f. 322a.

² This rule was embodied in the fullers' rules. See *Book of the Fullers* (in possession of the fullers' company at Coventry), f. 6.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 351. ⁴ 1530. *Ib.* ff. 346a, 351.

four days, let the master ask it of him again, and if he deny it eftsoons and will not pay, then let the master of the craft and three or four honest men of the craft come to master mayor and show unto him the dealing of that person." Whereupon the mayor and justices, should he refuse to pay double the original sum to the craft, were bound to commit him to ward until he promised obedience. The offender on his release was to make submission to the master entreating him to be "good master" to him during his year of office, and "his good lover" in time to come.¹

We may follow in detail the dealings of the corporation with several of the crafts. The fullers seem to have combined with the tailors to form the guild of the Nativity some time in the reign of Richard II., but were prevented from acting under the terms of their charter. In the seventeenth year of the reign of Henry VI. the royal license was renewed.² But the guild was a singularly ineffective body, holding little if any property, and soon after, possibly at municipal instigation, the two crafts who formed it were separated. The fullers obtained a third renewal of their license in the twenty-eighth year of Henry VIII., but at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries the master of their craft was nominated by the city leet.³ The dyers appear to have been more

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 322. A part of the proceeds of the craft fines frequently went to the repair of the town wall in the early fifteenth century. Among the cappers fines for breach of regulations went "half to the mayor and half to the craft" (*Ib.* f. 276a). ² Corp. MS. B. 46; B. 63. ³ *Leet Book*, f. 369a.

stubborn. Early in the reign of Henry V. they combined together to increase the price of dyeing of cloth by one-half, and to have the first claim to buy wool in the market.¹ In 1475 they attempted, perhaps, to renew their old combinations of sixty years back; and five years later Laurence Saunders, a member of their calling, became the leader of the opposition which prevailed during the close of the century within the city.² In 1496 all the thunders of the leet ordinances launched against those who, of their "froward wills," refused to contribute to the furnishing of the pageants played on Corpus Christi day, failed to make the dyers join with the other

¹ The corporation proposed in a petition to parliament that the twenty-four who elected the mayor should choose two drapers and two dyers to overlook the craft, and "present" them for any "fault or confederacy." See above, p. 259.

² In spite of the provision for overlooking regulations, says an order of leet for the year 1475, "divers craftsmen of this city now late have made divers conventicles and ordinances against the common public of this city. And amongst others the craftsmen of dyers' craft have made an unlawful ordinance, that is to say that none of them should colour nor dye but under a certain form amongst themselves ordained upon certain pains . . . ordained by surety of writing and oaths unlawful in that behalf. It is ordained by this leet . . . that the said unlawful and hurtful ordinances made by the said dyers and all other unlawful ordinances made in any other craft . . . and the unlawful oaths and writing made for the same be utterly void, quashed and annulled." None were in future, the order continues, to be bound by these rules, and masters suing others of their fellowship for not obeying them were to be fined £10. The largeness of the sum, and the fact that precautions were taken to have this order proclaimed once a year, "so that craftsmen might have knowledge" of the penalties incurred by any breach of the same, prove that the corporation was

crafts in paying their share.¹ When the municipality desired to thrust a new member into their craft, the dyers forbade the journeymen to work for him, and it was only by circumventing their tactics that the town rulers could compel the admission of the new candidate into their ranks.

Not only the workers in cloth, but all the fraternities were forced to bow to the corporation's will. In 1436 the attention of the leet was drawn to certain malpractices which had arisen among the workers in iron. A bill, drawn up no doubt by some member of the ruling class and presented by him to the court, shows the full extent of the evil and suggests certain measures of reform. Certain workers in iron, we are told, by employing labourers of the four allied crafts of smiths, brakemen, girdlers, and card-wiredrawers, had acquired entire control over the trade, and were able to pass off ill-wrought iron upon their customers. It was suggested that labourers of but two occupations should be employed by one master instead of those of four occupations as had been the custom hitherto.

"Be it known to you," the bill runs, "but yif certen ordenaunces of craftes withe in this cite . . . be takon good hede to, hit is like myche of the kynges pepull, and in speciall poor chapmen and clothemakers, in tyme comeng shullen be gretely hyndered, and as hit may be supposed the principall cause is like to be

thoroughly alarmed and determined to suppress the movement (*Leet Book*, f. 227a).

¹ *Leet Book*, ff. 273, 273a.

amonges hem that han all the craft in her own hondes, that is to sey, smythiers, brakemen, gurdelmen, and card-wire drawers, for he that hathe all thes craftes may, offendyng his conscience, do myche harme." A negligent smith, the bill continues, might heat the iron by "onkynd hetes," so that it became unfit for future use. "Never the later for his own eese he will com to his brakemon and sey to hym: 'Here is a ston of rough iron the whiche must be tendurely cheryssheth.'" When the brakeman has done his task, the metal comes to be sold for making fish hooks. "And when hit is made in hokes and shulde serve the ffisher to take fissue, when hit comythe to distresse then for febulnes hit all to-brekith, and thus is the ffisher foule disseyved and to him grete harme." And if the iron be used for making girdles, the master passes it to the girdleman with these words: "'Lo, here is a stryng or ij (two) that hathe ben misgouerned atte herthe, my brakeman hathe don his dever; I prey the, do now thyne.'" And so he dothe as his maister bid-dethe hym." Or it may be passed on to the cardmaker, who finds that it "crachithe and farithe foule; so the cardmaker is right hevvy therof, but neverthelater he sethe be cause hit is butte (bought) he must nedes helpe hym self in eschueing his losse, [so] he makithe cardes¹ ther of as well as he may, and when the cardes ben solde to the clothemaker and shuldon be ocupied, anon the tethe brekon and fallon out, so the clothe maker is foule disseyved. Wherefore, sirs," is the

¹ *i.e.* combs for combing wool.

conclusion of the bill, "atte reverens of God in fortheryng of the kynges true lege peapull, and in eschueng of all disseytes, weithe (weigh) this mater wysely, and ther as ye see disseyte is like to be, therto settithe remedy be your wyse discessions." For, as the petitioner suggested, if the two crafts of smiths and brakemen, and these only, were united on the one hand, and the two crafts of girdlers and card-wiredrawers, and these only, on the other, "then hit were to suppose that ther shuld not so myche disseyvabull wire be wrought and sold as ther is." For if the crafts were severed in this manner, it was argued, then the girdlers and card-makers would buy their wire from the smiths, and look well to their bargain. "And if the card-wiredrawer," the petitioner proceeds, "were ones or thies disseyved withe ontrewē wire, he wolde be warre, and then wold he sey vnto the smythier, that he bought that wire of: 'Sir, I hadde of you late badde wire, sir, amend your honde, or in feithe I will no more bye of you.' And then the smythier, lest he lost his customers, wold make true goode; and then withe the grase of godd (God) the craft shuld amend and the kinges peapull not disseyved with eontrewē goode."¹

The mayor, we learn, on this important occasion sent round to all the worthy men of the leet to take their advice upon the matter. Either the corporation sought an occasion of humbling the workers in iron, or the common sense expressed in this bill was irresistible; for the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 89.

leet fell in with the arrangement of severing the crafts. A number of master smiths agreed to employ only journeymen of this occupation and brakemen, while the cardmakers on the other hand undertook to find occupation for girdlers and cardmakers only. Furthermore, the leet decreed that their two last-named crafts should by “no colour ne sotell ymagynacion ‘sell or buy’ no cardwyre ne mystermannes wyre, the which may be hynderying or grevyng to the kinges lege pepull ‘under pain of £20.’”

The craftspeople, however, occasionally resented municipal interference, and endeavoured by all means within their power to get the control of the industry in which they were engaged into their own hands. Any temporary weakness or disorganization on the part of the corporation was taken advantage of by these fraternities. It was in 1456, when the finances of the city were in some disorder, owing to the expense of entertaining the Court and the active support given by the city to the Lancastrian cause, that the craftspeople took occasion to organize special courts wherein to punish offenders who had broken the rules observed by members of fellowships.

“Discord daily falleth out in this city among the people of divers crafts”—such are the words of an order of leet passed in 1457—“because that divers masters of crafts sue in special courts divers people of their crafts, affirming they have broken their oaths made in breaking divers their rules and ordinances, which rules ofttimes be unreasonable, and the punishment of the said masters over excess, which, if it continue, by likelihood would cause

much people to void out of the city." The masters were thenceforth forbidden to bring "any manner suit, cause or quarrel in any court special against any person of their craft," until "the mayor for the time being have heard the matter and variance . . . and have licensed the suit to be had."¹ But though defeated in this scheme, the crafts doubtless did not give up the battle. The dyers' attempt in 1475 to form confederacies happened in a time of great division within the town respecting the enclosure of the common pasture. And the same disputes agitated the community twenty-one years later, when a member of the party of discontented craftsmen nailed up inflammatory verses on the church door, taunting the corporation with injustice and inveighing against the rules they had made for the buying of wool and selling of cloth.

And indeed it may have been well that persons high in authority curbed the self-seeking spirit of the crafts. These bodies, formed early in the thirteenth century for

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 174a. In 1514 the crafts were commanded to give in their books so that the fines might be moderated at the mayor's discretion. According to an order of leet passed in 1515 a refusal to give in the books of regulations was to be visited by a fine of 100s. New rules were also to be enregistered in the mayor's book, and a 20s. fine taken from any craft for every month that a rule had been observed without the mayor's knowledge and license (*Ib.* f. 314a, 315a). In this year also the weavers "put up a bill" in the leet instead of punishing two men of their calling for defective workmanship at a special court. The offenders were commanded to find surety to the master of the craft to be true in their working, and if they were in future found in fault, the surety was to satisfy the aggrieved party and pay damages (*Ib.* f. 314).

mutual help and preservation, had since degenerated into close corporations eager to exclude competition at any price.¹ Fettered as they were by ordinances fixing price, hours of labour, and the like, there was so little free play allowed the craftsman in the management of his business, that the difficulty of acquiring wealth must have been great. Each company of craftsmen practically monopolised all the traffic or business connected with their special calling in the district in which they lived, and were bound to take good heed that the numbers of those who formed their body should not be greatly increased, lest the individual profits should be reduced. They were resolved at all hazards to guard against competition. The trade of the town might support ten tanners for instance, but the admission of an eleventh or twelfth into the craft might endanger the older members' prosperity. Thus, in 1424, the weavers showed a distinct dislike to allowing their members to take any number of apprentices,² who were potential masters of the craft; and the cappers, who in the fifteenth century had risen to be a very important body, demanded a fine of 2s. from any master on his taking a fresh apprentice into his house.³ This last-named fraternity allowed each master to take but two apprentices only, and when one departed before his serving-time of seven years was accomplished, the master was forbidden to take another in his place, without licence from the keepers of the craft, until the allotted time should be past.⁴ The

¹ Green, *Town Life*, II. 100. ² *Leet Book*, f. 27. ³ *Ib.* f. 276a.

⁴ *Ibid.* In a later version of the rule (*Ib.* f. 329) this matter is

corporation, however, wished to break down this exclusiveness, and in 1524 declared that any member of what craft soever might receive what number of apprentices he would "notwithstanding any ordinance to the contrary."¹ Some twenty years later, finding perhaps that this sweeping measure aroused too much opposition, the leet tried to thrust a modified form of it on the cappers.² Twice within a few months [1544-5] they decreed that any master of the fellowship might take an extra apprentice when one of them had served five and a half of the allotted seven years, and they repeated the order after a few years' space.³

The craftspeople had another method for keeping would-be members out of their ranks. They demanded on admission such fines as could only be paid by the well-to-do. And it was owing to their jealousy that precautions were taken to ensure the payment of these admission fines. Trouble came about, we are told, because new members departed from the town just when

worked out in detail. Each apprentice put in surety in £5 to remain with his master for the seven years. If the lad broke his covenant, it was only by handing over the £5 to the craft that the master could immediately take an apprentice in his place.

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 338.

² *Ib.* ff. 393a, 395a.

³ *Ib.* f. 408a. The masters of crafts exercised a particular form of oppression in forcing apprentices to take oaths on entering their service (cf. "the unlawful oaths of the dyers") perhaps to the effect that they would not set up in business after their apprenticeship was over. The craft masters were forbidden by leet to cause others to take an oath on "any point of their occupation" under penalty of a fine of 100s. "without any pardon" (*Ib.* f. 322).

the fine was due, a year after setting up their shop. They were henceforth to be compelled to pay half their fine at setting up, and to put in two sufficient sureties that the second half should be paid at the end of the first year.¹

It was part of the policy of the town rulers to recognise the apprentice's possible future citizenship, and withdraw him somewhat from his master's authority. The lad was therefore forced by the ordinance of 1494² to take the oath "to the franchises," and bring his twelve pennies to the steward for the town use when his term of service began. We see from the list of those

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 342 (1525). The fines for admission varied with the different crafts. The smiths (1497) asked 20s. from those desiring to enjoy the freedom of the craft. The cappers took from strangers 26s. 8d. and 13s. 4d. from town apprentices—payments extending in the smiths' case over three, and in the cappers' four, years, but nevertheless so high as to prevent the poorer class from entering the ranks of the crafts in question. In 1518 the leet determined to overcome the crafts' exclusiveness. Fines were then fixed for apprentices at 6s. 8d., payable at setting up shop, and for strangers at 10s., of which 5s. was paid at the end of the first, and 5s. at the end of the second, year after starting business (*Ib.* ff. 279, 276a, 322). The mercers' and drapers' apprentices paid the fine at the sealing of their indentures. Among the cappers, if any stranger neglected to pay his admission money, the journeymen were forbidden by the craft to work for him (*Ib.* f. 276a).

² *Ib.* ff. 272a, 274. For the discontent this act called forth see p. 240. The words of the oath, "I shall no felony nor treason do or thereto consent, and if I know any to be done I shall show it to the king and his officers . . . and duly . . . observe . . . all good rule and ordinance made . . . within the city," recall the craft conspiracies in the time of Laurence Saunders.

who took the oath in 1495 that the apprentice lived in his master's house, serving him usually—though not invariably—for seven years' space. He earned a nominal sum, perhaps a shilling, or even 4*d.*, the first six years, and a larger one, perhaps 10*s.* or 13*s.* 4*d.*, during the seventh. Thus the son of John Preston, of Stafford, "gentleman," who was apprenticed to a grocer, earned 12*d.* a year, the wages of his last year of service—the ninth—being unfixed; while another lad, learning the same trade, received 3*s.* 4*d.* as his last year's earnings. The son of a Durham "husbandman" took from his master, a hat-maker, 4*d.* a year for six years, and 6*s.* 8*d.* during the seventh. The crafts seem to have made it their business to see that the boys were properly cared for. If any one of them complained that his master did not give him sufficient "finding," *i.e.* food and raiment, the offender was to receive first an "admonition," and on the repetition of the offence to pay a reasonable fine; if matters did not mend, the lad was to be removed and placed elsewhere.¹ The master exercised a superintendence over the apprentice's moral well-being. In an early indenture of the time of Richard II. the lad promises to haunt neither taverns, nor houses of ill-fame, nor hold illicit intercourse with any of the women of the household.²

No doubt the number of apprentices was limited partly in order to prevent any one master from engrossing

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 329. Such was the rule among the cappers.

² Corp. MS. F. 2.

more than what was deemed his fair share of trade and profits. The craftspeople were very sensitive on this point. Thus, in 1424, quarrels arose between a certain John Grinder on the one side and his fellow-members of his craft of weavers on the other. The fact that Grinder wove linen as well as cloth, and had two sets of looms for the purpose,¹ had aroused the jealousy of the other weavers of the city. It may be remarked that this weaver was a man wise in his generation. He gained his cause and made his fortune, and filled the post of bailiff some time before 1449, being apparently the only man of his calling during the second quarter of the fifteenth century who ever occupied a high municipal office. Many precautions were taken to prevent undue rivalry between brethren of the same fellowship. It was usual among the artisan crafts for the member to report the closing of a bargain to the master or keeper of his fraternity.² And no other member of the calling could come between the contracting parties until the work was finished.³ But among the more powerful craftsmen means were often taken to defraud their brethren of the poorer sort. By collusion between butchers and tanners the latter were able to buy raw hides "in grate," or wholesale, with the intention, no doubt, of reselling them at a profit to others of the craft, a practice the corporation forbade

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 27.

² The member was "to warn" the master, who was to warn the other members of the fellowship (*Carpenters' Accounts*, Corp. MS. A. 4).

³ Under penalty of 6s. 8d.

under a penalty of forty shillings, to be taken from buyer and seller alike.¹ When any excessive profit was to be made, the public, then as now, was fair game. In Coventry, as elsewhere, ale-wives gave short measure, and used an unsealed cup. The clothmakers stretched out broadcloth to the "high displeasure of God and deceit of the wearers" to a length the material could ill bear. Of all these matters the corporation took cognizance, inflicting fines, punishing by the pillory, or in extreme cases by loss of the freedom of the city.

There was one point, however, on which both crafts and corporation were agreed, and that was on the advisability of checking unions and combinations among their workmen for the purpose of obtaining better wages. The journeymen's, or, as they were called, "yeomen's" guilds, which seem to have been fairly universal at the close of the fourteenth and during the fifteenth century, appear in Coventry with great frequency and persistence. Three several times the corporation obtained patents against the formation of guilds other than those already existing in the city.² The patent for the suppression of the first of these combinations that comes before our notice, the fraternity of S. Anne, is addressed to the mayor and bailiffs, in 1406, and relates how it had come to the ears of the government that a certain number of youths, serving men of the tailors and other artificers

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 273a. This order was re-enacted the next year (1495). *Ib.* f. 279.

² Corp. MS. B. 35 (18th Nov. 8 Hen. IV. 1406); B. 38 (8th Mar. 1 Hen. V. 1414); B. 47 (25th Jan. 19 Hen. VI. 1441).

working by the day called journeymen, gathered together in the priory, or the houses of the friars, and formed a fraternity called the fraternity of S. Anne, to the end that each might maintain the other in their quarrels. This action was likely, in the opinion of those in authority, to breed dissensions in the city, do great harm to the societies founded of old time, namely, the Trinity and Corpus Christi guilds, and hence bring final destruction upon the townsfolk. The meetings were declared unlawful, and all who persisted in assembling to hold them after the patent had been openly proclaimed were to be arrested, and their names certified to the king, who would have them punished according to their deserts.¹ But, in spite of this warning, the journeymen did not give up the conflict, for the fraternity had again to be crushed in the first year of Henry V.,² only to reappear in 1424 under the title of the guild of S. George.

Connected with this last movement was the discontent which affected the journeymen weavers in the year 1424. Indeed it is possible that the whole company of journeymen within the city were at that time making demand for higher pay. The weavers had a bond of union in a common fund which they apparently appro-

¹ Corp. MS. B. 40 (22nd Nov. 8 Hen. IV. 1406).

² Corp. MS. B. 41 (8th Mar. 1 Hen. V. 1414). These last two deeds are misdated—though with a query—in Mr. Jeaffreson's catalogue. A comparison of the dates of the patents of general prohibition with those for a particular suppression will show that they were executed in one instance on the same day, in another instance within an interval of four days.

priated to the furnishing of altar or processional lights, a pretext possibly like that of the journeymen saddlers in London in the time of Richard II., who, under "colour of sanctity" and religious meetings, "sought only to raise wages greatly in excess."¹ The movement among the Coventry weavers assumed all the forms of a modern strike. The men not only refused to serve at the usual wages, but hindered others from filling their place. The corporation took the matter in hand, and the question was finally settled by arbitration. The men were forbidden to hinder any of their fellows from working for their masters as they had done aforetime, and a regular rate of wages was established, whereby the journeymen took a third of the sum paid to their employers for the weaving of each piece of cloth, while the masters were ordered to exact threepence and no more from their workmen as a fine for each "contumacy," being, however, forbidden, under colour of this rule, to oppress their servants.²

Nearly a hundred years later we find that the fraternities of journeymen were still in existence, albeit jealously watched by the masters of the crafts. In 1518 all initiative was taken from them. "No journeymen of what occupation or craft soever," runs the order of leet, "shall make or use any *cave* or bylaw, or assembly, or meetings at any place by their summons without license of the mayor and the master of their³ occupation" upon pain of 20s. at the first fault; at the

¹ Ryley, *Memorial**, 543.

² *Leet Book*, f. 27.

³ MS. his.

second the offender's "body to prison," there to remain until the master and six honest persons of his occupation would speak for him.¹ At the same time the workers' fraternities were ordered to bring in the rules already made for the mayor's inspection. But the attempts on their part to form closer unions in order to facilitate concerted action still continued, and in 1527 we find the dyers' serving men assembling together for the apparently pacific purpose of attending marriages, betrothals, and burials, as if "they had been a craft or fellowship." These meetings served most likely as a cloak to more serious proceedings, and they were forbidden by the leet.² Nor was the movement entirely confined to the workers of the crafts; it spread among those outside guild organization. In 1517 the daubers and rough masons were forbidden to form a fellowship of themselves, but were henceforth to be common labourers, "and to take such wages as are limited by statute."³

In other matters we may see the discontented attitude of the workfolk. Thus the journeymen cappers objected to the lengthening of the hours of their working day, which in 1496 had been fixed to last from six till six, but which by 1520 was further increased by two hours in the summer-time, thus lasting from five in the morning to seven in the evening.⁴ Six years later it was enacted that, unless they kept these hours, it was per-

¹ *Lect Book*; f. 322a.

² *Ib.* f. 346a.

³ *Ib.* f. 320a.

⁴ *Ib.* f. 329a. The winter hours were also increased. The workmen came at 6 a.m. and left at 7 p.m.

mitted to any master to "abridge their wages according to their time of absence." Any rivalry in trade between masters and men was crushed whenever the masters' power availed to do so. Thus in 1496 the journeymen cappers carried on a contraband trade, and scorning to be content with the permission to "scour and fresh old bonnets" for that purpose, made new caps for sale; nor did the imposition of a fine of twenty pence at every default avail to check their activity. Therefore according to the rules of 1520 members of the craft were forbidden to give any work to those who knitted the journeymen's caps, or to the spinners who span for them, thus indirectly checking this illicit competition. In other ways the journeyman was made to feel the weight of the master's hand. Among the carpenters none could be set to work unless he had served for seven years as apprentice to the handicraft;¹ and a journeyman capper was compelled to certify the cause of leaving his late master to his new employer's satisfaction.²

These are some points connected with the life of mediæval craftsmen. Although so much has been written on the economical, social, and religious aspects of the subject, we are still very ignorant as to the actual workings of the craft system. Modern industry seems to have entirely passed through, and, as it were, forgotten this immature phase of its existence. The companies in Coventry which were able to survive the

¹ *Carpenters' Accounts* (Corp. MS. A. 4). ² *Leet Book*, f. 276a.

shock of the suppression of the guilds and chantries under Edward VI., and have lasted to our own day—the mercers, drapers, cappers, fullers, clothiers, and worsted weavers—possess none of the powers or organization of their predecessors, and are mere survivals of a bygone time, “the shadows of a great name.”¹

¹ The bakers' company is the only one existing at present in Coventry that possesses “any regulative power over the concerns of their special trade interest” (Fretton, *Memorials of Fullers' Guild*, 33).

XIV

DAILY LIFE IN THE TOWN—THE MERCHANTS AND THE MARKET

At the "beating of the bell called daybell," the townsfolk rose and began their daily work. Country people, wayfarers and chapmen, bearing their burdens of merchandise, saw the city in the morning light, with its ring of walls and upstanding posterns and gates overtopped by six tall spires, lying in the midst of fields and far-reaching common grounds in a slight dip in the plain. Entering the newly-opened gates, they were at once inside the narrow paved¹ streets, bounded on either side with black and white timbered houses, for travellers from the Warwick side did not make their entrance by spacious Hertford Street,² but by the Grey Friars' and Warwick Lanes, then part of the main thoroughfare of the city. Passing up the hill, they found that the street on a line with these—the Broadgate—belied its name, being but a very narrow thoroughfare, bounded on the left hand

¹ Rough stones were used for paving (Riley, *Liber Albus*, xlv.). The *Chamberlain's Accounts* (Corp. MS. A. 7) contain frequent allusions to paving: "Item, paid for paving within the Bablake gate, iiis." "Item, ii lods pebuls for the same, xviiiid."

² Built 1812 (Poole, *Coventry*, 345).

by a block of houses, whereof the removal in 1820¹ has caused moderns to think that the open space on the crown of the hill is very rightly named.

Soon after daybreak the streets were alive with the noise and press of a busy throng. It is true there were many impediments to traffic. Cattle² and ducks wandered hither and thither; fishmongers' stalls stood in the middle of the streets, greatly to the hindrance of the passers-by, whether horsemen or pedestrians;³ while inn signs⁴ had perforce to be limited in length, lest they should strike the heads of unwary riders in the by-lanes of the city. But the mediæval trader was well inured to inconvenience. Neither did noise distract him, though taverners and cooks standing at the door offered good things hot from the oven to passers-by,⁵ each seeking to cry louder than his neighbour; while in the open

¹ Poole, 315. See Mr. Addy's *Evolution of the House* in this series for a description of mediæval houses.

² Daily hurt comes from having beasts at large" (*Leet Book*, f. 210). In London only the swine of S. Antony's hospital were allowed to be at large in the streets, and "chiens gentils," i.e. dogs belonging to the gentry (*Riley, Liber Albus*, xlii.).

³ *Leet Book*, f. 178a.

⁴ In London the length of inn-signs was limited to seven feet (*Liber Albus*, lxxv.). Signs were also affixed to shops to attract the eye; of this custom the barber's pole is a relic. Merchandise was usually kept in cellars partly underground beneath the solar or front dwelling-room. In great thoroughfares goods were displayed in covered sheds projecting in front of the dwelling-place (*Turner, Dom. Arch.* I. 96; IV. 34). Shops were usually open rooms on the ground floor, with wide windows closed with shutters (*Liber Albus*, xxxviii.).

⁵ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologus, 225-9.

places the crier proclaimed the terms of a recent charter, or newly-made ordinance of leet or council;¹ and overhead the church bells pealed forth, calling folk to their prayers, to the market, or, in case of a brawl or riot, to a common meeting-place.²

Long before curfew the countryman had gone home to his village in the Arden country or by the London road to Dunsmoor Heath; while the traveller in his inn and the townsman under his own roof were soon abed. What light there was in the deserted streets on winter evenings came from the lamps which hung over the door of every hostelry and every substantial citizen's house, until nine o'clock,³ after which time the city gates were closed,⁴ and none were abroad

¹ *Leet Book*, ff. 159a, 38a.

² We hear of the "daybell" rung probably at dawn, and the curfew rung by the clerks of S. Michael's and Trinity churches (*Ib.* f. 202a). A "larum bell" was rung on the occasion of the quarrel between Somerset's servants and the watch (*Paston Letters*, I. 408). Probably there was a recognised "change" in the ringing for each of the various summonses. The ringing of changes is said to have been peculiar to this country. Bells, before they were hung up, were baptized and anointed with holy oil, blessed and exorcised. Their uses were expressed in the Latin lines :

"Laudo Deum verum—plebem voco—congrego clerum
Defuntos ploro—pestum fugo—festa decoro."

(Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes*, 291, 292).

³ *Leet Book*, f. 131.

⁴ In 1450 the chamberlains requested that four men should be appointed out of each ward to guard the gates; and these four were to choose one man to keep the keys and close them every night at nine (*Ib.* f. 149a).

save thieves and watchmen. Indeed, the very fact of being out after dark was in itself presumptive evidence of some dishonest purpose on the part of the belated wayfarer. At any suspicious sight or sound the watch were on the alert, and prepared to arrest the wanderer; should the prisoner escape and take to flight, they would instantly give chase, and fill the dark and empty streets with the echoes of their pursuit. A hue and cry would be raised, doors open, and householders pour forth to aid the watch. If the unlucky fugitive were captured, he would be committed to ward in all haste.¹

What a crowd of different types of men must have jostled against one another in the noisy throng! Craftsmen, attired in the livery proper to their calling, a custom whereof we have this day a relic in the butcher's blouse; merchants from foreign parts, or natives fresh from a sea voyage; mayor and aldermen clad maybe in estal scarlet; the crier and sergeants in the livery of the city; men-at-arms, the retainers of some great lord, bearing the badge of the earls of Warwick, or the Stafford knot; Benedictines, clad in white cassock and black gown and hood; Franciscans, with their brown habit and knotted girdle; Carmelites from Whitefriars in white frock and brown scapulary; Carthusians from the Charterhouse, with white cassock and hood; chantry and parish priests—all these, laymen and clerics,

¹ Jusserand, *Wayfaring Life*, 169.

warriors and traders, met, passed, and gave greeting in the streets.

Strange figures might be seen in the streets or the road neighbouring the city, such as the hermits, whose dwellings—the one by Bablake church,¹ the other at Gosford Green—stood at either end of the highway leading through Coventry. Times had changed; it was now customary for hermits to build by the highway, and no longer withdraw into solitary places, and spend their lives in prayer and meditation. They rather preferred to dwell in “boroughs among brewers,” seeking society and good cheer. Nor did the pilgrims, who might be seen flocking to the shrine of S. Osburg² to pay their devotions, invariably set about their task in a religious spirit. Many who travelled to the far-famed shrines of S. Thomas of Canterbury, S. Edmund of Bury, S. Cuthbert of Durham, or to “Our Lady” of Walsingham, to the Roods of Chester and Bronholme, or the Holy Blood of Hayles, looked on their journey as a holiday jaunt rather than as an act of devotion. Langland thought little spiritual good came from this gadabout

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 131. In 1362 licence was given to a recluse, Robert de Worthin, to inhabit a dwelling adjoining the church. A *hermit* was permitted to hold communication with his fellow-men, and might leave his hermitage when need required; but a *recluse* could not quit his dwelling, and must refrain from all unnecessary intercourse with the outside world (Cutts, *Middle Ages*, 94).

² Miracles were worked at S. Osburg's shrine, and her birthday was a local holiday. Palmer Lane and the Pilgrim's Rest preserve in their names token of ancient customs.

religion. A palmer in *Piers Plowman* covered with tokens of his journeys to the holy places of the east and west, "signes of Synay and shelles of Galice,"¹ a "vernicle"² and "keys of Rome," says:

"Ye may se bi my signes, that sitten in myn hat,
That I have walked ful wyde in wete and in dry,
And soughte god seynts for my soules helth."

But his hearer is not daunted by such a display of supererogatory holiness. "Knowest thou," he says,—

"Knowestow oughte a corsient (relic) that men calle treuthe?
Coudestow oughte wissen (show) the weye where that wy
(wight) dwelleth?"

"Nay," replies the pilgrim—

"Nay, so me God helpe, . . .
I seygh (saw) neuere palmere with pipe ne with scrippe
Axen after hym, er till nowe in this place."³

A pity it was, thought this great fourteenth century moralist, to go a-wandering in search of holy places, and neglect the homely virtues of truth and goodness which flourish beneath a man's own roof-tree rather than at the shrine of the most noted saint in Christendom.

Interesting, too, are several persons occurring in Coventry history, whose occupations were hardly so legitimate as those of pilgrim or hermit. We have had a glance at the ruinous house where John de Nottingham, the necromancer, by means of his waxen effigies wrought

¹ Cockle shells from the shrine of S. James of Compostella.

² A copy of S. Veronica's handkerchief, which bore a supposed impression of Christ's face.

³ Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Pass. V. 523-43.

such terrible evil to one of the prior's servants, and revenged the wrongs of the Coventry men. We would fain know more of John French, the alchemist, who appears in the *Leet Book*,¹ only to disappear directly from its pages. We learn in 1477 that he intended, "be his labor, to practise a true and profitable conclusion in the cunnyng of transmutacion of meteals to" the "profyte and pleasur of" the king's grace, and was, so Edward IV. charged the mayor, never to "be letted, troubled, or vexed of his seid labor and practise, to th' entent that he at his good liberte may shewe vnto vs, and such as be by vs therfor appointed, the cler effect of his said conclusions." There can be little doubt that the citizens looked askance at John French, and whispered that he dabbled in black magic and had dealings with the Prince of Darkness. We know not how many years the alchemist spent in his fruitless labours; or if he imparted his views on the subject of the "transmutation of metals" to the citizens, or ever journeyed to London to pour a tale of hope deferred into the ears of the disappointed king.

There were many sights in a mediæval city to remind us that men seldom cared to cloak their brutality in those days. The stocks, where offenders were held by their feet, the pillory, where they were held by the head and hands, stood conspicuous, probably in neighbourhood of the guild-hall. A pillory, a favourite place for the chastisement of fraudulent bakers, may yet be

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 230a.

seen in Coleshill, and stocks stand yet on many a village green.¹ Here the great punishment lay in the shame of exposure: the criminal stood for hours unable to move, a pitiful target for the derision of the multitude. The like penance was imposed on those who suffered at the cucking-stool,² followed by ducking in water, a highly disagreeable incident in the punishment. The prisoners in the gaol looked out into the highway,³ and perhaps held conversation with their friends as they passed. Now and then a craftsman might be seen among the debtors pursuing his calling, for it was not thought expedient to bring a man to utter destitution by depriving him of the means of livelihood during imprisonment; and those who chose might cobble shoes or work at the loom during those monotonous days. Hard by the busy worker might stand a felon, traitor, or murderer, his mind full of gloomy thoughts of his coming end.⁴ The gallows, naturally reared on high where all men might see them and their ghastly burden, were probably in sight of the prison; and rich and poor crowded to see a condemned man drawn in a tumbril, or executioner's cart,

¹ There is a specimen at Berkswell, near Coventry, and at Malvern.

² Order of leet: "Bailiffs to make a cuckstool before Whitsuntide" (*Leet Book*, f. 93a).

³ The gaol was certainly in the highway (*Ib.*, f. 149a).

⁴ *Ib.*, ff. 82a and 315. The prisoners paid the gaoler 1*d.* a week for their lodging when they had their own bed, 3*d.* a week if the gaoler provided them with one; over and above, debtors paid the gaoler 5*d.* for fee, if the debt for which they were liable exceeded 40*d.*

to the gallows, or a woman exposed to open shame. "It is ordained," an order of leet ran, "that William Rowett, capper, and his paramour be carried and led through the town in a car, in example of punishment of sin, and that all other that be proved in the same sin from this time forward shall have the same pain."¹ But these were only a few among many unpleasant sights that would attract the notice of a passing stranger. Heads of traitors stuck on the top of long poles often adorned the gates. Part of the body of Jack Cade was sent down in 1450, no doubt to breed terror into all disloyal beholders, and in 1470 the head of one Chapman² was set up on the Bablake gate; while that of Sir Henry Mountford, an adherent of Perkin Warbeck, shared the same fate in 1496.³ Gosford Green was the Tower Hill, and the Little Park the Smithfield of Coventry. At the former place Lord Rivers and his son suffered death under Warwick in 1469; while the latter saw the burning of many martyrs, including the famous Marian victim, Laurence Saunders.

Many were the efforts made to keep the place clean and wholesome to live in; but frequent appearances of the plague show that they met with but partial success.

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 99. See also for punishment of immorality, *ib.* f. 125*a*.

² Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 22. The other lists have Eliphane. I have no doubt that the right reading is Clapham. This man was an ally of Warwick, and led the rabble of Northampton to the battle of Edgecote in 1469. He was beheaded next year.

³ *Il.* f. 25.

At the awful visitation known as the Black Death there remained not "the tenth person alive," we are told, to bury the dead;¹ while in 1479 the plague carried off 3,300 of the inhabitants.² Filth of every kind was deposited in the Cross Cheaping under the magnificent cross itself, much incommoding the folk who thronged to the market-place, and "dangerous," the leet jury complained, "of infection of the plague," and by sweeping the pavement there dust was raised, which did "deface and corrupt" the said cross.³ In that half of [the city wherein the prior held sway] the people put all the refuse of their houses just outside the Cook Street gate, with the result that when the country people did not come to carry it away to manure their fields, the lord prior could not "have his carriage through his orchard."⁴

According to orders of leet, however, a better system should have prevailed. The sergeants collected every quarter a penny from each citizen dwelling in a house with a hall door, and a halfpenny from every shop, to provide a cart which carried away the filth from the streets.⁵ Moreover all the citizens were enjoined to clean that portion of the pavement which lay in front of

¹ Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 8. A slight exaggeration, no doubt.

² *Ib.* f. 23. It is computed that the *ordinary* mortality of a borough in the Middle Ages was almost equal to that of a town during a visitation of cholera in the present day (Green, II. 30).

³ *Leet Book*, f. 394.

⁴ *Ib.* f. 237a.

⁵ *Ib.* f. 11. The filth and street sweepings were ordered to be carried "beyond the stake set in the dyke beyond the Friars' Gate," or to pits without the gates (*Ib.* f. 4).

their dwellings every saint's day under payment of a fine of 12*d.* This order was hardly a popular one, and the sergeants were continually taking distress from those who would not pay the quarterly cart-rate, or raising fines for the omission of the festal cleaning. For the good folk evaded all sanitary regulations whenever they might do so with impunity. As for those misdoers who threw filth into the common river, to enquire concerning them was a hopeless task.¹ This was, as the mayor and corporation owned to prior Deram when he loudly complained thereof, one of the worst evils of the city. Coventry seems, however, never to have fallen into such an evil plight as Hythe did in the fifteenth century. Here, owing to the abominable habit of casting refuse into the streets, to say nothing of blocking them with all imaginable obstructions,² they were more like evil-smelling swamps than highways fit for traffic.

Measures, somewhat primitive in character,³ were taken to guard against an outbreak of fire, which so frequently wasted mediæval cities, where the plaster and timber of the houses, with their projecting storeys almost touching one another across the narrow streets, afforded excellent fuel for the flames. A stone house was

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 239. The worthy men of the leet besought the mayor that there might be certain citizens appointed to have oversight of the river, each in their several district, and that the rules for cleaning it should be duly kept (*Ib.* f. 41*a*).

² Such as timber frames for houses, trunks of trees, etc. (Green, II. 29, 30).

³ In London the bedels of each ward had a hook to tear down burning houses (Riley, *Liber Albus*, xxxiv.).

a rarity, and in the fifteenth century bricks were as yet not in general use. The leet forbade the building of wooden chimneys or the roofing of houses with straw in lieu of tiles.¹ Moreover late mayors and other officers with "commoners of thrift," were forced to provide leather buckets, "such as the aldermen think sufficient" to hold the water wherewith to quench the flames. In order to prevent the supply of water—brought in a leaden pipe from a spring without the city²—from being exhausted, a lavish use of it was not permitted. The conduits, whereof there was one in Cross Cheaping, and another, called the Bull, probably by the Bablake Gate,³ were kept locked during the night, and brewers were forbidden to take water thence for their brewing, or any one to wash linen and clothes therein.⁴ The practice whereby individuals, by means of a grant sealed with the common seal, obtained a licence to take water continually from the conduit for their private use, was looked on most unfavourably, and finally forbidden by the leet.⁵ No doubt the people who wished to obtain this permission were the wealthy brewers and victuallers who were answerable for so many disturbances in Coventry.

For here as elsewhere this important class of town-folk made great profit out of the "pence of the poor," in spite of law and ordinance. One of the great prob-

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 219.

² The spring was called Conduit Head, (Corp. MS. C. 227).

³ There is still a yard called Conduit Yard close to Bablake church. ⁴ *Leet Book*, ff. 115a, 202a. ⁵ *Id.* f. 72a.

lems facing mediæval legislators and local authorities was the task of ensuring the natural price of provisions. "No police of the Middle Ages," says Thorold Rogers, "would allow a producer of the necessities of life to fix his charges by the needs of the individual, or, in economical language, to allow supplies to be absolutely interpreted by demand. The law did not fix the price of the raw material, wheat or barley. It allowed this to be determined by scarcity or plenty—interpreted, not by the individual's needs, but by the range of the whole market. But it fixed the value of the labour which must be expended on wheat and barley in order to make them into bread and ale."¹ The central government ordained what weight of bread was to be sold for a certain sum, and what price should be given for a gallon of ale; and the enforcing of the law was the business of the local authority. The local rulers themselves fixed the price of other provisions—fish, meat, poultry, and wine—allowing for profits according to a certain scale on their resale by victuallers.² Stringent rules were laid down against the enhancement of price by "forestalling and regratery," that is intercepting merchandise on the way to market and selling it at an increased price. For example, native fishmongers, it was feared, would lay in wait for travelling salesmen bringing in "panyers" of salt fish, and, after buying the same, would ask a higher price for it before the next fasting

¹ Rogers, *Six Cent.* 140.

² Green, *Town Life*, II. 36. Profits on wine were in some cases 2*d.*, in others 4*d.* a gallon.

day. So to guard against this contingency, strangers selling fish were forbidden to be "osted or inned" in the house of a native brother of the craft, but to pass the night at inns at the mayor's "limitation," and after "making relation" to him of the kind of fish they brought, to sell the same openly in the common market-place.¹ A multitude of regulations were also made to ensure the good quality of provisions, the mayor examined all fish brought by foreign fishmongers, whilst ale-tasters, appointed by the bailiff, summoned by each brewer to taste his new beer, received "a gallon of the best ale" at the detection of any default. In addition to all these expedients for regulating price and quality, the statute-book provided for the giving of a just quantity to the buyer at the conclusion of every bargain. On each opening day of a new mayoralty all shopkeepers and victuallers delivered up their weights and measures for the mayor's inspection, and after comparison with the standard model, kept in the town chest, they were sealed if found correct, or, if faulty destroyed.

On his entry into office, the mayor's "crye" or proclamation informed all and sundry of these regulations, and of the perils consequent on their infringement. Here we learn the price of "coket" bread² and horse-bread

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 4a.

² *Ib.* f. 1a. The three most common kinds of bread were *wastel*,—bread of the finest quality; *coket* (seconds); and *sinnel*, twice-baked bread, used in Lent (*Green*, II. 35).

at that time; how in 1421 wine of Rochelle was to be sold at 6*d.* a gallon, Malvoisey at 16*d.*, and "no derer upon the peyn of xxs. at every trespass," and that on Oseney, Algarbe and Bastarde the "mayor and his peres" would set a price when any occasion of selling offered.¹ The "crye" tells us what penalties were laid on those who made use of fraudulent measures, "coppes and bollys" unsealed,² and how informers were stimulated by the promise that whosoever gave notice to the mayor of this abuse should "have *iiii*d.** for his travayll and a gallon of the best ale" and also what hard punishments were meted out to those who practised forestalling and regratery.³

But in spite of all these regulations the task of curtailing profits seemed a hopeless one, and again and again the worthy men of the leet confess that the law remains a dead letter through the frauds of the victuallers. These, we are told, holding their heads high, refused to sell their wares at the "limited" price, "and in maner destitucion the seid cite of wyne and vitayle" to the manifest hurt of the inhabitants, and of all people "confluent to the same." While, when the mayor insisted that the bakers should obey the orders of leet regulating their trade, the whole craft "struck" with the greatest unanimity, and, leaving the city "destitute of bread," took sanctuary at Bagington, a village about four miles distant. Night, however, brought council, and they submitted next day to the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ib.* f. 3*a.*

mayor, paying for their lawlessness a fine of £10.¹ As for the brewers in the sixteenth century, they found their calling so lucrative that others were thereby encouraged to forsake their occupations and take up this profitable trade. At that time, said the worthy men of the leet in 1544, "divers of the said brewers nothing regarding the displeasure of God, the danger of the laws of the realm, nor the love and charity which they ought to bear to their neighbours in the commonwealth of this city, for their own private lucre . . . do . . . regrate and forestall barley coming into this city to be sold," and sell ale at excessive and unreasonable prices.²

Regulations, however, affected this powerful and wealthy class but little, and in listening to the ever-renewed complaints against them we begin to realize the universal detestation in which they were held in the Middle Ages. Mediæval imagination, with its love of the grotesque, delighted to picture the unhappy end of those who bade defiance to the laws of God and man. How hardly shall an alewife, thought the Ludlow artist, "enter the kingdom of Heaven," and in carving the *miserere* seat of the parish church he shadowed forth her fate. "A demon is bearing away the deceitful one; she carries nothing about her but her gay head-dress and her false measure; he is going to throw her into hell-mouth, while another demon is reading her offences as entered in his roll, and another is playing on the bag-

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 253.

² *Ib.* ff. 302, 302a.

pipes by way of welcome.”¹ A pleasant man was that Ludlow artist,—one, we may fancy, who abhorred cheating, and dearly loved his glass.

Ordinances of leet were frequently passed upon the order to be maintained upon a market day, for there was but scanty room for traffic in the Cross Cheaping, even though the carts can have been no wider than trollies, taking up but “the brede of a yard” in passing by. Stalls and boards were a great encumbrance. “No fishmonger,” runs an order of leet, “(can) have his board standing forth at large in the street for to let cart, horse or man, but that there be a reasonable space left . . . between their houses and their boards.”² Round about the market-place were clustered the dwellings of provision merchants and the lesser craftsmen. Ironmonger Row, Butcher Row or the Poultry, Cook Street and the Spicer-Stoke³ tell by their names the calling of those who lived or chiefly trafficked there;⁴ while the drapers made their homes hard by the Drapery, in Bayley Lane and Earl Street.⁵ On market days this neighbourhood

¹ Wright, *Domestic Manners*, 337.

² *Leet Book*, f. 178a. Probably carts made for town use were always narrow; see illustration in Wright's *Domestic Manners*, 344. Compare the trollies made for the “Rows” at Yarmouth.

³ The old name for the thoroughfare between Trinity church and Butcher Row. A spicer is equivalent to the modern grocer.

⁴ Cf. Milk Street, Fish Street and S. Margaret Pattens in the city of London; Bridlesmith Gate and Fletcher Gate (fletcher = an arrow maker) in Nottingham. See on this subject Mr. Addy's *Evolution of the House* in this Series. It was customary for the members of each calling to live close together.

⁵ Poole, 396.



From a photograph by

BUTCHER ROW, COVENTRY.

[Wilson & Co.]

was crowded with the overflow of stall-holders and salesmen; the poulterers standing before the Priory gates, and round about the Bull-ring "usque finem de le Litel Bochery,"¹ while the fishmongers and leather sellers had stalls within the Cheaping itself.² Other stalls were placed in the procession way in S. Michael's churchyard, and the sellers of cloth had an illicit market in the church porch opposite the Drapery door, until it was made forbidden ground by a leet ordinance. For all merchants and chapmen resorting to the city on the Friday were forced by this authority to sell all their mercery, cloth and linen inside the Drapery;³ and all sellers of wool to have their merchandise weighed at the Wool-hall hard by, and pay a fee for the weighing thereof at the "Beam" or public weighing machine.

Equally stringent were the orders of leet, which curtailed the privileges of the "foreyn," who came to buy or sell within the city. He was not allowed to purchase corn in the market until mid-day, three hours after the townsfolk had been admitted to make their bargains.⁴ A certain time of sale was assigned him,⁵ and very frequently his goods were examined by the mayor ere

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 133 v. ² *Ib.* f. 412.

³ See Corp. MS. B. 75 for description of the Trinity guild lands, of which the Drapery was a parcel. The annual rent payable to the Trinity guild of a half bay in the Great Drapery was 6s. 8d. (C. 194).

⁴ *Leet Book*, f. 326a. All people dwelling outside the town liberties were called "foreign."

⁵ For regulations concerning "foreign" bakers, *Ib.* ff. 362, 413.

he could dispose of them in the market.¹ If his trade competed in any serious degree with that of the city craftsmen, there was no end to the restrictions where-with he was hampered. Urged by a spirit of local monopoly,² the authorities regulated the trade in hides and tallow in favour of the dealers of the city, though on the butchers' assertion that the country tanners would give a better price for the hides than their town brethren, the rules were somewhat relaxed. No chandler, however, was permitted to sell more than twelve pounds of candles out of the city³ to one purchaser.

The frequent enactment of these and similar regulations in the early sixteenth century shows the terror with which the townsfolk looked on the spread of industry in country districts. Owing to the conversion of arable land to pasture for sheep farming, agricultural labourers had been thrown out of work; many therefore were employed in handicrafts in their own houses and their competition was thought to seriously threaten the prosperity of their town neighbours.⁴

At the Corpus Christi fair all was bustle and activity in Coventry, and the mayor had doubtless much ado to settle all the disputes arising from differences of currency or hard driving of bargains at the pypowders court, for all the world of the neighbourhood came to lay in stores for the year, and merchants from far and

¹ *c. supra*, p. 295 for the fishmongers.

² See Green, II. 39.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 315a.

⁴ Rogers, *Six Cent.* 340.

near to sell their wares. Eight weeks a farmer's life is said to have been spent more or less in visiting fairs and markets,¹ and undoubtedly a merchant employed a far longer period in travel to and from these centres of trade. Our forefathers were not altogether such simple stay-at-homes as we love to picture, but, rather, experienced travellers, and in those days travelling meant experience, and was not as it is now—at least in civilized countries—a method of getting from place to place which puts no tax on the body, and the least possible on the mind, of the traveller. All manner of men and of merchandise² were to be seen at the fair. Irish traders brought druggets from Drogheda; coarse cloth came from the west country;³ Frenchmen brought dyes for cloth; Bristol traders wine from Guienne and Spain; country gentlemen and local graziers bales of wool for export or home manufacture.

It is true that in spite of its popularity, the Corpus Christi fair never equalled the S. Giles' fair at Winchester, the centre of trade between the southern countries and France, or that of Stourbridge, near Cambridge, the great mart for horses, and the centre for commerce between the eastern counties and Flanders. The former

¹ Rogers, *Six Cent.* 152. In Leicester there were no pleas held when the great merchants were absent at fairs (Green, II. 25).

² Merchants from Dublin, Drogheda, London, and Kingston-on-Hull, were members of the Corpus Christi guild; so were many local country gentlemen and yeomen.

³ Devon and Ireland supplied coarse cloth sold in the Drapery (Burton MS. f. 98-103).

lasted fourteen days, and brought no inconsiderable profit to the bishop of Winchester, into whose coffers the tolls found their way. Meanwhile all trade within the city was suspended, and even in Southampton nothing save victuals could be sold, so that all the local traffic was diverted into the channel of the bishop's fair. Still more important was the September fair of Stourbridge. For three weeks the allotted space, covered with wooden buildings arranged in streets named according to the nations or to the special trade of those who occupied them, were thronged with English and foreign merchants. The former came to bargain for the Italian freight of eastern spices, for Spanish iron and Norwegian tar and pitch, for Flemish diapers and lawns, and for amber from the Baltic, while the latter carried home English cloth and wool, and when barley was cheap, a plentiful supply of it for the Flemish breweries.²

To many, however, the fair at Coventry, the centre of traffic on the great road to the north-west, was the chief event of the whole year. The local makers displayed to the utmost advantage the bales of Coventry cloth, and the blue thread, to which the skill of the native dyers gave the colour which was the envy of the whole country. This merchandise could be bought openly by the strangers, who jostled against one another before the stalls in the Drapery. But many transactions, which the dealers hoped would not come to light, must have taken place unnoticed in

¹ Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* pt. I. 100.

² Rogers, *Six Cent.* 149-152.

the busy crowd. The prior of Sulby, in terror of the rapacity of Henry VIII., sold his cross-staff to the wife of a London goldsmith at Coventry fair one Corpus Christi day, just as the monks of Stoneley—provident men—about this time disposed of a silver censer, and other things “worth £14 or thereabouts,” to Master John Calans, goldsmith, of Coventry.¹ May-be the spare scholar might there be seen, as at the fair of S. Frideswide, at Oxford, counting the few coins his purse contained to find out if they would avail to purchase a book he coveted greatly. While in Elizabeth’s days Puritan purchasers, who found the “Martin Marprelate” tracts edifying reading, could obtain these locally printed attacks on the episcopate from some discreet salesman.² But the bulk of the buyers were local folk: farmers on the look-out for a good horse, or intent on replenishing the stock of sheep-dressing, and their wives keenly enjoying a bargain over some pewter vessels, or article of “mercery,” a gay belt or kerchief for the daughters at home.

More important transactions than these frequently took place, and not at fair time only but throughout the year, as the records of the mayor’s court of Statute

¹ Gasquet, *Monasteries*, II. 285. This took place shortly before the dissolution.

² The “Marprelate” printing press was for some time at Coventry (Morley, *Sketch of Literature*, 481). Rogers thinks unlicensed books were sold at fairs. “I cannot conceive how the writings of such an author as Prynne could have been disposed of except in a place which was at once so open and so secret” (*Six Cent.* 149).

Merchant clearly show. The amount of the various purchases was, when viewed from a mediæval standpoint, very large; a "gentilman" of Attleborough, for instance, in 1415, acknowledges that he is bound to certain Hinckley folk and others "in ducentis libris" (£200 sterling), while a Dublin merchant, Dodenhall, without doubt a connection and kinsman of the Coventry mayors of that name, owed in 1394 a fellow-merchant of the latter place £210, money which he did pay before distress was levied upon him. The following, however, would be a more usual example of recognition of debt: "On the eighteenth day of the month of February, in the third year of king Henry the Fifth after the Conquest, at Coventry, William Lyberd, hosier, of Coventry, acknowledges that he is bound ("recognoscit se teneri") to Thomas Dawe of Coventry, passenger, in sixteen pounds sterling, payable at Coventry at the feast of S. Michael the Archangel next ensuing."¹

When all the bargaining was over, when the debt had

¹ Corp. MS. E. 6. This court was kept in accordance with the Statute of Merchants, of 1283. By this a merchant had the power of bringing a debtor before the mayor, the debtor bound himself to pay the debt by a certain day; if he failed to do so, the mayor caused all his movables to be seized to the amount of the debt and sold. If, however, he had no movables within the mayor's jurisdiction, application was made to the chancellor, who caused a writ to be sent to the sheriff within whose county the debtor had movables, ordering these to be seized. If the debtor had no movables, he was detained in prison until terms were made, the creditor meanwhile providing him with bread and water, the cost of which was added to the amount of the debt (Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* pt. I. 204).

been duly paid, or the amount enrolled at the mayor's court, men thought of other things. The "commons" of Coventry could discuss the everlasting "Lammas" question with the Nottingham men, while those who took more interest in national politics whispered to one another complaints against abuses in church and state. They hinted darkly at the cause of the death of the "good" Duke Humphrey, condemned the malice of the Yorkists, the scandals of the archdeacon's court, or lifting their eyes to the defaced monastery and cathedral, spoke of the high-handed character of the "King's Proceedings."¹

The nightly sojourn at inns was a great feature of the wayfaring merchant's life, for it was only in sparsely-peopled districts that monasteries afforded hospitality to the travelling trader.² "Strangers and baggers of corn between Yorkshire, Lancashire, Kendal, and Westmoreland and the bishoprick," the people of the north declared at the dissolution, "were greatly helped both horse and man by the said abbeys; for never was in these parts denied either horse-meat or man's meat, so that the people were greatly refreshed by the said abbeys, where now they have no such succour."³ But the majority of wayfarers sought shelter⁴ either at inns or

¹ Rogers thinks that rebellions were often planned at fair time. ² Rogers, *Six Cent.* 136-7; Ashley, *Econ. Hist.* pt. I. 98.

³ Gasquet, *Monasteries*, II. 96. It seems that the amount of assistance rendered to wayfarers by monasteries has been much exaggerated.

⁴ Rogers notes that when the warden of Merton and two

at *herbergeors'* houses, for the private citizens, even the richer merchants, frequently increased their gains by the entertainment of travellers. The public inns were often the scene of gambling and intrigue, and unwary guests, who had not the wherewithal to discharge the heavy bills they had been induced to contract, frequently found their baggage seized to several times the amount of the debt. "The greater barons and knights were in the custom of taking up their lodgings with *herbergeors*, rather than going to the public hostels; and thus a sort of relationship was formed between particular nobles or kings and particular burghers, on the strength of which the latter adopted the arms of their habitual lodgers as their signs."¹ It might still be possible to learn the story of the connection between certain noble houses and the inhabitants of a given district by means of inn-sign heraldry; while from the same source we could gather a hint of popular political feeling at a later date. The jubilant cavalier would swing his sign of the *Royal Oak* at the Restoration, and the staunch adherent of the "Great Commoner" flaunt his *Old King of Prussia* in the next century, just as surely as the mediæval inn-keeper decorated his sign with the

fellows of the college made a journey from Oxford to Northumberland in 1332, they always stayed the night at inns, except when they lodged at one of their own manors (*Six Cent* 137).

¹ Wright, *Domestic Manners*, 333-4. Larywood and Cotten assign another reason for this practice. Great men's town houses were frequently let during their absences from home (*History of Signboards*, 4).

White Hart, *Blue Boar*, or *Bear and Baculus*, in honour of his patrons Richard II., Richard III., or the earl of Warwick. Famous old inns in Coventry were the *Crown*, in "platea vocata Brodeyatys" hard by the Langley's inn, the *Cardinal's Hat*, in Earl Street.¹ The *Peacock*, still existing in the last century, was near the Butcher Row, but the locality of the *Angel*, where Stafford, duke of Buckingham lodged, is unknown. One authority speaks also of the *White Rose*, of late years the *Roebuck*, still standing in Little Park Street, where the Yorkists held rendezvous, and the *Red Rose* in Much Park Street, a meeting-place for Lancastrians.² The herbergeors frequently received distinguished guests. Henry VII., after a triumphal entry into Leicester on his way from Bosworth field, came to Coventry, and took up his lodging in the house of Robert Onley, the mayor, at the Bull, in Smithford Street, a visit he repeated in two years' time, when he conferred on his host the honour of knighthood.³

The Coventry merchants, like their fellows in other towns, had plentiful dealings with the outside world. The Botoners, whom tradition credits with the building of S. Michael's spire and chancel, held intercourse, it seems, with the men of Bristol, for they married a daughter of their house to a native of those parts, and

¹ Corp. MS. C. 202; *Leet Book*, f. 218.

² Fretton, *Mayors of Coventry*, 10.

³ *Ib.* 12; Poole, 403. An interesting sign, the *Lamb and Flag* (Agnus Dei), in Spon Street, reveals some connection with the Templars.

she became the mother of the chronicler, William Worcester.¹ As the traders of a later generation, the Botoners, most likely, conveyed their wine and wax in vessels towed up the river Severn, a journey beset with difficulties, as the towing-path was overgrown with brushwood, and private landowners and corporate towns on the river bank demanded tolls from the passers-by.² The Bristol men, too, were not averse from straining a point in the matter of tolls, and in spite of the grants of freedom the Coventry men possessed, demanded "keyage" from them,³ when their goods were upon the landing stage. Many times did Adam and William Botoner serve in the mayor's office, and their donations to the church, to town guilds, murage funds and the like are numberless. As for the great tower of S. Michael's steeple that the brothers built, tradition credits them with spending £100 every year for twenty-one years upon the work.⁴ In the early part of the fifteenth century the family entered the ranks of the country landowners by the purchase of an estate at Withybrook. Not only at Bristol, but at Southampton, the chief port of the south, where French dyes were sold, did Coventry men carry on a great part of their trade. And William Horseley, mayor in 1483 and member of the dyers' craft, brought about an agreement between the men of this port and his fellow-

¹ *Paston Letters* (ed. Gairdner), I. cxiii. Worcester often preferred to call himself by his mother's maiden name.

² *Rot. Parl.* V. 569.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 270a.

⁴ Sharp, *Antiq.* 61. It seems an incredible sum, and the statement should be received with caution.

citizens in 1456, whereby mutual freedom of tolls was secured.¹

But the trading enterprize of these inland dwelling townsfolk was not confined to their native country merely. Another family, the Onleys, whereof one John Onley, the founder, was mayor of the Calais Staple,² had dealings with merchants beyond sea. This foreign intercourse was often beset with danger to life and limb. John Onley, son of the above, was apprenticed to one Thomas Aleyn, a London mercer. When travelling to Bruges in 1413, where the chief staple for cloth then was, on his master's errand, this apprentice fell into the hands of a goldsmith of that place, who, because he could not obtain redress for the treatment he and his goods had received from an English "roberdesman" in the neighbourhood of Dover, kidnapped and kept John Onley as hostage. At last the good folk of Bruges, fearing the anger of the English, forced him to let the apprentice go.³ Our sympathies are divided between the innocent lad and the outraged goldsmith, for in the wilder parts of England "roberdesmen" were a veritable scourge to the foreign trader. Did not Henry III. hang more than sixty of the brigands of Alton, who had plundered certain merchants of Brabant, though the whole county of Hants conspired to ensure the acquittal of the accused?⁴ Occasionally the

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 174a.

² Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 13. Onley is said to have been the first Englishman born in Calais after it was taken by Edward III. ; his father was a standard-bearer in the English army.

³ *Proceedings Privy Council*, I. 355. ⁴ Rogers, *Six Cent.* 99.

highwaymen also attacked English folk. In the days of the third Edward, there was a pretty gang, composed chiefly of "gentlemen born," who beneath the shelter of Cannock Chase did much harm to the merchants of Lichfield, and apportioned what spoil they took "to each according to his rank."¹

But foreigners were quick at reprisal when debts were owing to them, or any injury had been done by English merchants. And the proud traders of Lübeck and Bergen, members of the Hanseatic League, who warred with and dictated to kings, were especially sensitive in this respect. This may be seen by the fate which befell Laurence Cook, afterwards twice mayor of Coventry, in the days of his apprenticeship to William Bedforth, and Thomas Walton, servant to John Cross, another local merchant, who aided in the erection of S. Mary's Hall. For in 1398, as they lay in the ship of one Thomas Herman, of Boston, in the port of Stralsund, certain allies of the League, who had some grudge against the English traders, fell upon the apprentices, beat and wounded them "minus juste," taking moreover from the ship 240 dozen pieces of cloth of divers colours, Bedforth's property, valued at £200; "much merchandise" belonging to Cross, worth half the sum, and other pieces of cloth, exported by a third Coventry merchant, valued at £50.² Such incidents as these were not uncommon in the lives of mediæval merchants, and for the making of a

¹ *Archæological Journal*, IV. 69.

² Sheppard, *Litteræ Cantuarienses* (Rolls Series, 85), III. 81.

successful trader it was necessary that a man should have a dash of the warrior and a great deal of the adventurer in his composition. Trained by exposure to such perils by land and sea as now-a-days only explorers undergo, it is little wonder that they proved themselves keen, energetic, and resourceful in their civic life.

The servant of one Mr. Wheatley had a happier adventure than Laurence Cook when in the sixteenth century he undertook a journey to Spain. For, wishing to purchase steel gads, he bought a chest at a fair, and lo! when it was opened it was found to contain ingots of silver, treasure brought perhaps from over the Spanish main. The servant, not knowing of whom he bought them, Mr. Wheatley—honest man—kept them for a time, but as no enquiry was ever made, he gave the profits, amounting with contributions from the city to £96 a year, to the maintenance of twenty-one boys at a school at Bablake, an institution which exists and thrives even to this day. This benefactor, the “Dick Whittington” of Coventry, is a person of whom we would gladly learn more. The real Sir Richard, “thrice Lord Mayor of London,” was, as historians tell us, not the poor friendless wanderer of legend, but the hopeful son of a well-to-do family of the country gentry, and was apprenticed to a wealthy London merchant by his kinsfolk after the orthodox fashion.¹ But as yet no historian has deemed it necessary to investigate Mr. Wheatley’s early career, and we still believe that he came to

¹ Besant and Rice, *Sir Richard Whittington*.

Coventry as a nameless adventurer, "a poor boy in a white coat," as Dugdale says. He died a bachelor, and bequeathed his fortune to charity.¹

But Mr. Wheatley was not the only benefactor the city knew. Wealthy merchants were generous givers, and the education of youth and provision for the sick and needy were not matters held to be solely within the Church's province. The names of Richard Whittington and John Carpenter² of London, and of Cannynge of Bristol, deserve ever to be held in remembrance, and there are hundreds of other half-forgotten donors entitled to an equal fame. Thomas Bond, merchant of the Staple, founded at Bablake a hospital for ten men "and one woman to look after them," the candidates to be chosen on a general day of the Trinity guild, and, as bedesmen of this omnipotent fraternity, to repeat three times a day Our Lady's Psalter for the brethren of the guild. Both Bond's almshouse and that erected by William Ford, merchant, and William Pisford, at Grey Friars, still remain, and are among the few perfect specimens of domestic architecture of the sixteenth century that we possess. The latter, first enriched by Ford's will in 1509, contained six men and their wives, the nominees of the Trinity guild, each couple receiving $7\frac{1}{2}d.$ a week for their maintenance.³ The guilds indeed made the relieving of the

¹ Dugdale, I. 194.

² The City of London school was founded on Carpenter's devise.

³ Poole, 292-301.

poor, whether in almshouses or without them, an imperative duty. There was always a regular sum paid to "mendyaunts" (beggars) appearing in the accounts of the Corpus Christi guild each year. Thus in 1492 we learn that 25s. 4d. was paid to beggars, and that the master also "asked allowance" of £17 6s. for diminutions of the guild rental "and allowances for mendyaunts of the seid gilde."¹

But it was not the welfare of the aged alone which absorbed the charity of these merchants. To John Haddon, draper, is due the honour of initiating the system of granting loans to young freemen to aid them in beginning commercial life. By his will (1518) he bequeathed £100 to be distributed among men of the drapers' fellowship—poor clothmakers the *Leet Book* calls them—in loans of £5 each, to enable them to buy wool or cloth, for the cloth trade at that time was undergoing a period of great depression in Coventry, and £100 to be similarly divided in £4 loans among young freemen of all occupations; all loans, free of interest, to be repaid at the end of the first year.² His example had numerous imitators;³ but undoubtedly the gifts of Sir Thomas White, mayor of London and founder of S. John's College, Oxford, whom Mary knighted for his loyalty at the time of Wyatt's rebellion,

¹ *Corpus Christi Guild Accounts*, Corp. MS. A. 6, f. 43a.

² *Leet Book*, f. 323; Fretton, *Mayors*, 14.

³ Thomas White, alderman and vintner, of Coventry, Henry Over and others.

surpassed the rest. At the time of their greatest need, in 1543, he lent the corporation £1,400, wherewith they purchased certain lands and tenements confiscated at the Reformation, and they agreed to distribute £40 arising from the rents of the tenements in loans to apprentices of the city for nine years' use.¹ From some cause or other, probably by reason of his great and numerous acts of benevolence, and the backwardness of the corporation in paying a promised annuity, Sir Thomas fell into poverty in his later years, and seems to have been utterly cast down by the thought that his wife would be left without provision. "Whereas I have gently written unto you heretofore," he writes in 1566 to the mayor and corporation, "to let my wife have her annuity of £46 for part of her jointure, I require you as you shall answer before God at the day of judgment that you lett my wife have £24 assured to her during her life." Two days after another letter betrays his unbearable anxiety on this subject. If the mayor and corporation are not able to perform the undertaking with regard to the jointure, "I shall even," he says desperately, "cast my colledge for ever . . . so am I utterly shamed in this world and the world to come."² Happily for the cause of "true religion and sound learning," the college was not abandoned, and we will hope the Coventry folk fulfilled their contract.

Long before the Reformation and Mr. Wheatley's gift

¹ Poole, 303.

² Corp. MS. A. 79, f. 63.

the sons of the Coventry burghers attended school, for it is an error to suppose that the education of the laity began with the grammar schools founded by Edward VI. Indeed these foundations were but the "fresh and very inadequate supply of that which had been so suddenly and disastrously extinguished"¹ at the Reformation. Nor was the occupation of teaching confined to the monasteries. The trading-class in or before the fifteenth century threw themselves heartily into the work of providing schools for the coming generations. In most cases the support of these institutions was committed to the leading local guild. In London alone nine grammar schools were set up in the reign of Henry VI,² and in many other places the bounty of some well-to-do bishop or merchant enriched country towns with the endowment of a grammar school. At Coventry there was, it is true, a school at the priory for the "children of the aumbry,"³ but it appears that there were other "teachers of grammar" in the city, whose well-being was a source of anxiety to the leet, and to these, perhaps, the citizens preferred to send their children to be instructed in the Latin tongue. In 1426 it was enacted by leet that "John

¹ Rogers, *Six Cent.* 165. Leach in his *Schools of the Reformation* gives this theory substantial support.

² Green, II. 13-16. The drapers had a school at Shrewsbury, the merchant-tailors in London. The guild of S. Laurence of Ashburton had charge of the grammar school, founded by bishop Stapledon in 1314. Other schools—as far as we know—not immediately connected with guilds were at Hull, Rotherham, Ewelme, Canterbury, Reading, Appleby, Preston, Liverpool, Cambridge. ³ *Leet Book*, f. 100a.

Garton shall come to the city of Coventry, if he will, to keep a grammar school there.”¹ Garton, however, if he came at all, probably soon made way for a successor, for in 1429 we find an order of leet to the effect that “Mayster John Pynshard, skolemayster of grammer, shall have the place that he dwellethe inne for xls. (40s.) be yere, whyles that he dwellethe in hit, and holdyth gramer skole hym self ther inne.”² The prior appears to have looked upon these teachers as the rivals of the conventual schoolmasters, but the corporation did their best to soothe his jealousy, and in 1439 the mayor and six of the council, at the request of the leet, went to the prior to “commune” with him concerning this matter, “wylling hym to occupye a skole of gramer, yffe he lyke to teche hys brederen and childerun of the aumbry, and that he wolnot gruche ne move the contrari, but that every man of this cite be at his fre chosse (choice) to sette his chylde to skole at what techer of gramer that he likyth as reson askyth.”³ No doubt the town school continued to prosper, for we find at the time of the suppression of the chantries in 1543 that the Trinity guild paid £6 13s. 4d. as a yearly salary to the schoolmaster. All this general activity in education goes to prove that the men of the later Middle Ages were not the illiterate boors historians have loved to imagine. The knowledge of reading, writing and Latin, or, as they called it, grammar, was surely very widely diffused, when not only a multitude of scribes, but farm

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 38x.² *Ib.* f. 48.³ *Ib.* f. 100a.

bailiffs could make, audit and balance accounts in that language.¹

Not only were the citizens called on to support by their charity almshouses and schools, and to furnish loans for youthful enterprize, but the poor made a constant demand on their bounty, and in the sixteenth century poverty was greatly on the increase. The town rulers were confronted with a problem which, then and subsequently, has been found incapable of solution—the problem of the “unemployed.” In the reign of Henry VIII. a terrible influx of vagabonds from the country set in, well-nigh driving the local rulers to distraction. Here we first gain some glimpses of a surplus population of shiftless, landless, moneyless folk, driven by the decay of tillage to seek work in the towns. These families, together with the whole labouring class, were later reduced to unspeakable poverty by the debasement of the coinage and depreciation of silver, circumstances which, while affecting wages but little, greatly increased the price of food. This difficulty was at first unfamiliar to men’s minds. Society had been hitherto somewhat stationary. Individuals lived and worked where their fathers had lived and worked before them, or at least remained in a town where they had been able by a seven years’ apprenticeship or by purchase to obtain civic rights. But townspeople were jealous of granting freedom to any but the well-to-do, who would be able to share the burden of taxation,

¹ Rogers, *Six Cent.* 165; *Agric. and Prices*, IV. 502. Even artisans could draw up accounts.

and the wanderer, who by quitting home had dropped out of the framework of local society, became one of a herd of vagabonds liable to be punished according to the utmost rigour of the law.

The town rulers did not attempt to solve this question, they shelved it. This wretched population was perpetually ordered to "pass on." "And those bygge beggers," says an order of leet passed in 1518, "that wilnot werke well to gete their levyng, but lye in the felds and breke hedges and stele mannys fruyte . . . let theym be banysshed the town, or els punyssh theym so without favor, that they shalbe wery to byde theym."¹ And again and again aldermen were exhorted to cause "lusty beggars and vagabonds" to "voyde out of their ward" upon pain of imprisonment.² Only such impotent and needy beggars as were licensed, and had the city seal, the sign of the elephant, on their bags, were allowed to remain and demand charity.³ But the worthy men of the leet did not refuse to aid those who suffered undeservedly from the acutest misery. "If any by infirmity or multitude of children be not able by his labour to sustain his family," the aldermen were ordered to provide for their sustenance out of the town chest.

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 323.

² *Ib.* f. 319a.

³ *Ib.* f. 332. "A token of their bagges of the signe of the Olyvaunt."

XV

DAILY LIFE IN THE TOWN (*continued*)

RELIGION AND AMUSEMENTS OF THE TOWNSFOLK

HIGH above market-place and churchyard, above booth and stall, and the life and movement of a busy crowd, rose a forest of magnificent spires, three from the cathedral and one from either parish church. And after the day's chaffer many a busy trader would turn aside and enter the long aisles to listen to the chanting of vespers or tell his beads before the image of his patron saint. But there was little quiet and repose to be found within the sacred walls, for the parish church was not wholly reserved for the uses of religion, being rather a centre of the common life of the town, a place for the transaction of daily business. In Southampton church the merchants stored their grain or wool, the theft whereof was punished by excommunication; the overflow of markets and fairs pressed within the aisles or precincts as at Salisbury and Wells. Local lampoons were fixed to its doors, and in many places councillors met within its walls for consultation, or the commonalty assembled there to make grants of land or transact business. The cathedral was the place chosen by the bishop and mayor of Exeter wherein to discuss their mutual

grievances. While at Bridgewater the king's judges held trials in the Grey Friars' church.¹ We hear of seditious verses nailed to the door of S. Michael's, and of a cloth market in the porch,² and the Coventry churches were put to a stranger use than any before noted—they were converted into hospitals in time of plague. So in the long dim aisles of the cathedral the sick and dying, as they looked up from their rough beds, beheld the glory of the saints and the torments of the lost on painted window and frescoed wall. Meanwhile the priests went backwards and forwards at their work of administering the last Sacraments to those about to die, and the Hospitallers of S. John the Baptist's hospital,³ who were well used to nurse the sick, tended may-be to the bodily needs of the sufferers. The laity highly valued this custom, and at the dissolution of the monasteries the mayor pleaded that the cathedral might be spared, not only because the "lack and decay of it," he says, "will be a great defacing of the said city, but also a great hurt and inconvenience to all the inhabitants there in time of plague. The friars' churches there being already suppressed, and no place for the infected people and others, who are no small number in plague time, to resort to, but

¹ See for these particulars, Green, I. 153-6.

² In 1659 the members of parliament were elected in the church (Sharp, *Antiq.* 21).

³ On S. John the Baptist's hospital see Sharp, 155-60. The poor and infirm were received into the hospital. There is no evidence that the brethren nursed the sick in plague time, but from their office one would expect them to do so.

only the parish churches, having but two in all the city.”¹ The mayor’s plea, however, was unavailing; of S. Mary’s cathedral, defaced, pillaged, then used as a local quarry, there scarcely remains one stone upon another.

In these days of tempered enthusiasm and lukewarm local interest we can hardly realize what a source of joy and pride these churches were to the townsfolk. Self-denial had enabled them to raise these goodly buildings, which they gave of their best to beautify. The painters, masons, carpenters and carvers of the city did the work; the red sandstone, which, alas! so soon crumbles and decays, came from the local quarries; and though the grand outline of S. Michael’s may be due to some bishop of the thirteenth century,² the design of the building, with which we are now familiar, came from the brain of a local architect,—some parish priest, perhaps, or master mason of the city. For the churches of Trinity and S. Michael’s were practically built anew from their foundations,³ neither perhaps by one family of merchants, but by the whole body of parishioners in the hey-day of the city’s wealth,⁴ while the small colle-

¹ Gasquet, *Monasteries*, II. 435.

² Perhaps to bishop Patteshull, who died 1238. Beresford, *Diocesan Hist. Lichfield*, 127.

³ Rogers assigns the comparatively low cost of building in mediæval times to the absence of middle-men’s profits. A tower which cost—allowing for the relative value of money—£1,703 12s. 6d. in the fifteenth century could not be now raised under a sum between £4,000 and £5,000 (*Six Cent.* 543).

⁴ In 1391 the prior agreed to pay an annual pension of 100s.

giate church of S. John the Baptist was raised by the Trinity guild. All these show the influence of the new "Perpendicular" style; but S. Michael's more than the rest is a triumph of the amazing lightness and technical skill so characteristic of the architecture of the fifteenth century—a style which, though lacking the strength and mystery of the earlier Gothic of the thirteenth century, has yet a certain majesty of its own.

Having once built the churches, the townsfolk made provision for continual prayer and supplication to be held therein. With a touching belief in the efficacy of prayer, even vicarious, and a business-like intention of making the best of both worlds, these worthy men devoted large sums to the support of chantry priests, who, while their patrons were engaged in secular business, prayed for the souls of the faithful departed and for living members of the town guilds and brotherhoods.¹ In the lady chapel of S. Michael's the priests of the Trinity guild chanted daily the "Antiphones of the Virgin" and the psalm *De Profundis* on behalf of the founders of the fraternity.² Similarly a priest said mass at the altar of Our Blessed Lady in Trinity

for six years and to provide six trees if the parishioners would rebuild the chancel of Trinity church at their own charge, providing the materials and paying for workmanship (Sharp, *Antiq.* 71).

¹ Besides parochial chaplains there were six chantry priests at S. Michael's in 1522: two at Trinity; a warden and seven secular priests at Bablake; and, at the Reformation, according to one account, fourteen or fifteen chaplains at S. Nicholas' church (Sharp, *Antiq.* 5, 72, 132, 129). ² *Id.* 25.

church "for the good estate of king Richard and Aune his queen, the whole realm of England, and all those by whom this altar is sustained . . . and for their souls after death," remembering especially his patrons, the brethren of the Corpus Christi guild.¹ The dyers' and drapers' priests had their appointed task, so had the chaplains of S. John the Baptist's and S. Nicholas' churches, while the bedesmen, as their name implies, in the almshouse offered daily prayers for the welfare of the members of the Trinity guild.

But the good folk were not content with offering their supplications by proxy. Although much of the spiritual fervour of the thirteenth century died away in the later Middle Ages, the townsfolk were methodical and regular in their religious observance and attended church with due decorum on Sunday and holy-days. In the pews sat the city officers and their wives each in their degree, the various craftsmen occupying no doubt the special chapels called after their names, and the apprentices and servants sitting or standing "in the alleys."² The walls of the churches were bright with fresco, where even the most ignorant could learn the stories taken from the lives of the saints or from Holy Writ; it is only within living memory that the smoke has blackened a rediscovered representation of the Last Judgment above the chancel arch of Trinity church. And when the worshippers lifted their eyes to the window-glow they beheld amid the company of the saints scenes

¹ Sharp, 81.

² Green, I. 154.

taken from local legend,¹ the old compact for the freedom of the market between Leofric and Godiva, the blazoning of the arms of founders and benefactors, and the insignia of trade and craft.² For the mediæval artist saw no firm line sundering the things of religion from the affairs of daily life, and the people did not care to keep their civic patriotism and aspirations solely for the guild-hall. In the aisles and chapels lay the most honoured of the city dead; Bond and Haddon were laid among their fellow drapers, and the tomb of Ralph Swyllington, recorder, may yet be seen on the mercers' side in S. Michael's church.

The craft companies paid an annual rent for the chapels within their keeping, whither they repaired at least once a year to keep the festival of their patron saint and present their offerings. Thus each of the cappers subscribed twelve pence a year towards the maintenance of the furniture in S. Thomas's chapel in S. Michael's and presented a penny as an offering on the feast of the translation of the saint.³ In these chapels, where the glory of goldsmiths' and

¹ The figures of Godiva and Leofric were to be seen even in the last century in the window in Trinity church.

² The scissors of the shermen may yet be seen in a window in S. Michael's.

³ Sharp, *Antiq.* 30. The girdelers paid 3s. for their chapel to the churchwardens (*ib.* 33). The company of the cappers is still in existence; and every year, in the month of February, the members repair to the chapel and eat bread and butter and drink wine there.

artist's work¹ testified to the munificence of the crafts-folk, dead members of the brotherhood were occasionally buried, and their *obits* or anniversaries kept.

It was a common practice to bequeath house property to provide funds for the continual commemoration of the testator's death and prayers for his soul's peace. Thus in 1492 Richard Clyff, late parson of S. George, London, bequeathed to the church of Holy Trinity, Coventry, a tenement in Well Street "to the entent . . . that the Wardeyns of the same Church, for the tyme beinge yerely, for evermore, observe and kepe within the same Church, in the vigyll of Saynt Alphege, placebo, and dirige over nyght, by ii well-dysposyd prestys, there to be said devoutly without note; and on the morowe after, ayther of the same prestys to say messe of Requiem for the soules of John Cliff, and Margarete hys wyff, hys ffader and moder, hys own soule, all hys ffrendys, Saulys, and all Crystyan Saulys." Other features of the obit were the distribution of alms to the poor, and the feast which followed the service. Thus on the day whereon Robert Burnell's obit wa kept 4s. was given to the poor, and 3s. 10*l.* expended in bread and ale.²

When a craftsman died, the whole company of his brethren were present at his burial, which, if he were a noteworthy citizen, would take place with much solemnity at the Grey Friars' or one of the parish

¹ See Sharp, *Antiq.* 30, for an inventory of the cappers' possessions in the chapel.

² *Ib.* 92.

churches.¹ Funeral masses were invariably said in the cathedral, the offerings remaining to the use of S. Mary's minster and convent; the candles also that had burnt about the coffins² were left in the cathedral after the dead had been borne away to their graves. Whether the people of Coventry disliked this practice we cannot tell, but it brought the convent into collision with the Grey Friars, who, as an active and popular body within the town, were rather disposed to call the authority of the monks in question. The matter of the funeral candles and offerings touched the former very nearly, for their chapel was a favourite burial place; and in 1446 friar John Bredon threw down his glove. We would fain know if brother John were a mere busybody or a born reformer; perhaps he belongs rather to the latter than the former class, as he also appears, it seems, as a champion of the poorer folk against the deceiving victuallers.³ Be this as it may, he was a man of great

¹ The drapers, mercers, dyers, cardmakers, and saddlers (later the cappers), smiths, and girdlers had chapels in S. Michael's church; the butchers, dyers and tanners in Trinity. The fullers held the chapel of S. George on the Gosford Gate. Some of the inferior crafts, viz. the pinner, tilers, and coopers had their annual mass and drinking at Whitefriars.

² This matter of the candles seems to have roused dissensions at an early date. In 1282 the corpse of a woman to be buried in the friars' cemetery at Dunstable was first conveyed to the priory church there for the funeral mass. The monks boasted that out of eight candles they only gave two to the Franciscans, keeping all the rest for themselves (*Cornh. Mag.* VI. 835).

³ The MS. annals note that in 1438 "Friar Bredon got the old strike again" (Harl. MS. 6,388, f. 18).

influence with the citizens, and, together with the prior, had helped on a former occasion to still the religious excitement which had followed on the preaching of Grace, the hermit. The enmity between the friars and the convent, dating as far back as the time of Edward I.,¹ was at last the cause of his overthrow. Concerning this matter of the candles, the friar was so moved to bitterness that he openly preached and affirmed "in the parish churches of this same citee . . . that alle maner offerynges owen to be yeven alonely to theyme that mynistren the Sacraments to the parisshe," and bade the people give these candles to the parish churches; "permytting my selfe," he says, "to defende theyme that so did." Moreover the friar declared "that in Englonde was not so bonde a Citee as this Citee of Coventry is, in keping and observyng the said custome"; and in bills which he set up on the church doors he "promysed to delyver the pepull of this same Citee from the thraldom of Pharaow." The prior of S. Mary was not to be daunted by this audacious front, and petitioned the king against friar Bredon. In due time sentence was pronounced, and a form of recantation arrived prescribed by parliament. In presence of the Forty-eight² the friar was compelled to admit that the custom he had inveighed against "is a custom commendable, and so owyng to be kept and observed

¹ In 1289 archbishop Peckham wrote to the monks concerning the "root of bitterness germinating between them and the friars" (Peckham, *Reg. Ep.* III. 963). ² *Let Book*, f. 129a.

to encrease of mede, by pleasure made to Almighty God, who graunte to you and me to lif in this world aftir juste lawes and lawful customs vertuously, soo that we may deserve to rejoyse (enjoy) hevenly recompense everlastyngly."¹ After which recantation he was banished the city.

The citizens were as thorough and systematic in their pastimes as in their prayers, and all sorts of amusements of a vigorous character, wherein they gladly indulged, were rarely discouraged by the corporation. The practice of archery was looked on as part of every man's necessary training, and crafts were ordered to keep butts in good repair, so that all members of their fellowships could keep their hands well in use.² Bull-baiting, a favourite sport, gave its name to the Bull-ring hard by Trinity church;³ but the traces of "le cokfytyng place"⁴ and of the bowling-green near the Charterhouse,⁵ have been lost.

Bear-baiting was highly popular likewise, and frequent

¹ Leland, *Collectanea*, V. 301; Sharp, *Antiq.* 207.

² *Leet Book*, f. 202a. The old archery ground is commemorated in "the Butts," now a street, but once outside the walls. A "butt" is properly a mound on which the target is set up. In Edward IV.'s reign butts were ordered to be made in every township, and the inhabitants were to shoot on all feast days under pain of $\frac{1}{2}d.$ at every omission (Strutt, *Sports and Pastimes*, 57).

³ Chamberlains to make a ring for the "baiting of bulls as heretofore" (*Leet Book*, f. 21a).

⁴ No one to shoot arrows in "le cokfytyng place" (*Ib.* f. 102a).
⁵ *Ib.* f. 322a.

gifts to Sir Fulk Greville's bearward¹ form a feature in the chamberlains' accounts in the early days of Elizabeth. Like all the great queen's subjects the men of Coventry delighted in theatrical representations, and now that the local religious drama was dead, their appreciation of the strolling players' art caused constant inroads to be made on the public purse. The wardens were frequently called upon for payments, such as "to the Earle of Darbyes players vs.," "to the lord Chamberlain's players xs.,"² items which accord ill with the payments for sermons at this time.³ In the end the sermons gained the day, and it would be hard to find in the Midlands—save Banbury—a more staunchly Puritan town than Coventry under the Stuarts.

In the sixteenth century the corporation appear to have become disquieted at the reckless lives and illicit amusements of those over whom they ruled. A new era was about to dawn, wherein mediæval barriers would be broken down; and it seems as if the discreet and worthy burghers were afraid of the lawlessness and unrest which had entered into the spirit of society, and which in itself was the sign of coming change. Orders directed against gaming,⁴ or intercourse, especially on the part of apprentices, with women of evil fame had always been a feature of the regulations passed by the

¹ *Chamberlains' and Wardens' Accounts* (Corp. MS. A. 7b, f. 2)
"Paid to Sir ffoulke Grevile Bearewarde iiis. iii l."

² *Ib.* ff. 2, 8.

³ "Paid for 3 sermons of Mr. Butler's and ringing to them
35s. 3 l." (*Ib.* f. 1).

⁴ *Leet Book*, f. 159a.

leet; but as time goes on the mention of "unlawful games" becomes more and more frequent. As early as 1509 the aldermen of the several wards were charged to make search "for all them that keep misrule," who on being discovered were to be committed to ward, or, if they persisted in their evil ways, to be banished the city.¹ In 1516 this command was followed up by a fresh ordinance enjoining them to make enquiry for vagabonds, "as well women as men," suspected alehouses, 'blynde ynnes,' unlawful games, and the like.² But the evil appeared to increase as the century advanced, and in 1548 a complaint of leet reveals a state of things which has quite a modern look, so little change has human nature and human habit undergone these three hundred and fifty years. Many, we learn, passed their time drinking in taverns, and "playinge at the cardes and tables,"³ and spende all that they can gett prodigally upon theym selves to the highe displeasure of God and theyre owne ympovershyng, whereas," the worthy men of the leet were of opinion, "if it were spente at home in theyre owne houses theyre wiffes and childerne shulde have part therof."⁴ It was forthwith decreed that any of these prodigals, whether "labourer, journeyman, or apprentice," if discovered resorting to any alehouse on a work day should be imprisoned for a day and night.

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 308.

² *Ib.* f. 320a. "Blind inns" were secret taverns, where, of course, all sorts of irregular proceedings went on.

³ i.e. draughts. ⁴ *Leet Book*, f. 404.

In those days, as in our own time, the lower classes had the keenest appreciation of all that appertained to sport, and the loafer loved to roam the country lanes with a dog at his heels. Long time since the prior had complainel how the citizens hunted and hawked in his warren, and in the sixteenth century the corporation were hard put to it to keep this passion within the bounds prescribed by the statutes of the realm. People, we hear in the eighteenth year of Henry VIII., who did not possess the necessary qualification, a 40s. freehold, presumed to keep birds and dogs, "whereby idleness is greatly encreased"; henceforward they were forbidden to keep hawk, hound, greyhound, spaniel, or ferret, or to presume to hunt with the same under a heavy penalty.¹

Other practices in which the citizens indulged were looked upon with an unfavourable eye by the rulers of the town, brawling being expressly forbidden. No one was allowed to carry defensive weapons through the streets, and hosts were charged to bid their stranger guests leave their swords behind them, when they had occasion to leave the hostels wherein they had taken lodging.² The penalty for smiting "with a knife drawyn" was half a mark, unless the smiter were "himself defendant." "No man of craft," another order runs, "shall bear bills, or gysarnes or straight staves," upon pain of forfeiture of the same weapons. Those who were driving cattle to market could, however, carry a small

¹ *Lcet Book*, f. 341,

² *Ib.* f. 3a,

staff in their hands.¹ These orders did not suffice by any means to abolish brawls, and sometimes lords, knights and squires, the "mighty" men of the country round, fought out their ancient family quarrels among the dwellings of the burgher folk;² at others the citizens had their own grievances to urge against one or other of these mighty men, and drew sword upon him and his retainers. In these cases there would be, most likely, death or shedding of blood, while in disputes arising among the citizens themselves merely blows and beatings would be given on either side, but with such violence that combatants were afterwards often spoken of as "in despair of their lives" from the injuries they had received.

Troubles of this kind were a feature of the times when the gentry flocked into the city to see the far-famed Corpus Christi shows, or to be near the Court, for Henry VI. and his queen tarried frequently at Coventry. On Corpus Christi even in the year 1440 Sir Humphrey Stafford and his son Richard were attacked in the Broadgate³ after nightfall, as they came from Lady Shrewsbury's⁴ lodging, by Sir Robert Harcourt and his men. Richard was slain and his father wounded in the darkness and confusion, while two of the Harcourt faction died also in the fray. All this took place, says John Northwood, writing to Viscount Beaumont, "as men say,

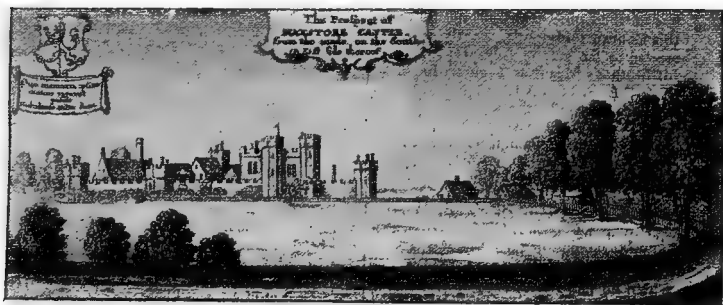
¹ *Leet Book*, f. 3.

² See below. The Harcourt and Stafford quarrel.

³ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 169.

⁴ Wife of the famous Talbot.

in a Paternoster while." It was a terrible business; Northwood, evidently striving to be exact, could hardly describe how it happened. The two chief enemies, he says, "fell in handes togyder, and Sir Robert smot hym (Sir Humphrey) a grette stroke on the hed with hys sord, and Richard with hys dagger hastely went toward hym, and as he stombled on of Harcourts men smot hym in the bak with a knyfe, men wotte not ho hytt was reddely; hys fader hard noys and rode toward hem and



MAXSTOKE CASTLE, THE ABODE OF HUMPHREY, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM.
(From Dugdale's *Warwickshire*.)

hys men ronue before hym thyderward, and in the goyng downe of hys hors, on, he wotte not ho,¹ be hynd hym smot hym on the hede with a nege tole,² men know not with us with what wepone, that he fell down and hys son fell down be fore hym as goode as dede." And the whole affray—characteristically enough—was "be cawse of a nold debate that was betwene heme for takyng of a

¹ i.e. Who.

² i.e. Edge tool.

dystres as hyt is told." The law was not always prompt in bringing gentlefolk to account, and Sir Robert Harcourt at that time escaped justice, only to be overtaken by revenge, however, twenty-two years later, when he died at the hands of the Staffords.¹

Among the citizens also certain feasts and merry-makings ministered occasion for riots and quarrels. Such were the Lammas feasts, whereon the chamberlains, with a tumultuous following, opened out the common pasture lands that encircled the city.² Such again were the three great processional nights, the vigils of Corpus Christi, of S. John the Baptist (Midsummer eve) and S. Peter. "The people come at Lammas," runs an order of Leet, "in excess number and unruly, to ill ensample;" and it was laid down that only a few from each ward, who had been appointed by the corporation, should accompany the chamberlains on their annual ride. Moreover "great debate and manslaughter and other perils and sins" fell out on Midsummer eve and S. Peter's night, because so "great a multitude" was gathered together at that season within the city, "that it lieth in no man's power . . . for to please them all";³ and the Church tried to interfere in the interests of peace, but without success. Occasionally the good folk of the place fell to blows, it would seem, on ordinary working days, without having their presence at a

¹ *Paston Letters*, I. 73.

² Chamberlains to have 5s. allowed them for Lammas expenses (*Lect Book*, f. 208a). ³ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 180.

merry-making to urge in extenuation of their fault. Thus in 1444 the corvesars, or tanners of leather, fell out about some obscure point or other with the weavers, and so hotly did the quarrel rage between them, and so frequent the exchange of deadly blows, that Thomas Burdeux, weaver, was said to be in "despair of his life" by reason of the sore beating he had received. The quarrel was allayed, according to the wisdom of the mayor and his discreet council, by the drinking of a certain amount of ale among the fellowship of both crafts at their joint expense.¹

But few pleasures appealed to the mediæval citizen so strongly as that of dining well; and besides these peace-promoting drinkings there were many occasions whereon members of guilds and crafts met together to feast and do their best to justify the reputation, which still clings to city folk and aldermen, of loving good cheer. The meals of the Middle Ages were long and heavy. The highly-flavoured cookery, with its strange mixture of meat and sweets—fowls stuffed with currants was a favourite dish—would appear barbarous to modern epicures; but such as it was, vast preparations and much money were lavished upon it. The members of each craft fellowship met once a year to hold a feast, while the brethren of the Trinity guild celebrated the Assumption and S. Peter's Eve by a banquet, and probably also the festival of the Decollation of S. John. The Corpus Christi had a "Lenton" dinner, a "goose"

¹ *Lect Book*, f. 108a.

dinner in August, and a "venison" one in October,¹ and in 1492 they spent £26 0s. 4d. on their feasts, a sum only 13s. less than the annual stipend due to the five priests supported by the guild.² But the record of common feasting is not yet exhausted. The members of the Corpus Christi fraternity met together at a breakfast on the morning of the festival of the Body of Christ, and all the crafts supped on cakes and ale on the great processional nights. One dozen spiced cakes, three dozen white cakes, "a seysterne" and a half of ale with "comfets," and a pound of "marmalet" were ordered for the carpenters' merry-making on Midsummer eve, 1534.³ Nor were the journeymen forgotten on these joyous evenings; they partook of plainer fare—bread and ale—at their masters' expense.

On Midsummer and St. Peter's eves the townsfolk gave themselves up to mirth and jollity, decorating banqueting-halls, streets, and houses with birchen boughs and all manner of greenery.⁴ This custom was, Stowe tells us, also observed in London, where every man's door was "shadowed with Greene Birch, long Fennel, St. John's wort, Orpin, white Lilies, and such like, garnished with Garlands of beautifull flowers, and

¹ Corp. MS. A. 6. *Corpus Christi Guild Accounts*, ff. 54, 56, 80.

² *Ib.* f. 43.

³ The smiths spent money recklessly at this season until 1472, when it was ordained that the master of the craft should be allowed 5s. on Midsummer, and 3s. 6d. on S. Peter's eve, "and not a penny more," wherewith to provide supper (Sharp, *Mysteries*, 183).

⁴ *Ib.* 179.

had also Lamps of glasse, with Oyle burning in them all the night.”¹ But lamps were not the only means of illumination on those joyous nights. “On the Vigils of Festivall dayes and on the same Festivall dayes in the Evenings,” continues the London chronicler, “after the Sun-setting, there were usually made Bone-fires in the streets, every man bestowing wood or labour towards them. The wealthier sort also before their doores, neere to the said Bone-fires, would set out Tables on the vigils, furnished with sweete bread and good drinke, and on the Festivall days with meat and drinckes plentifully, whereunto they would invite their neighbours and passengers also to sit, and be merry with them in great familiarity, praying God for his benefits bestowed on them. These were called Bone-fires, as well of amity amongst neighbours, that being before at controversie, were there by the labour of others reconciled, and made of bitter enemies loving friends.”²

It is good to dwell on this scene of frank gaiety and open-handed hospitality, the pleasantest, to my thinking, that has come to us from mediæval times. The dusk lighted by the flicker of the bonfires, the flower-wreathed houses, the merry groups, the hand-clasp in token of reconciliation, what a picturesque glimpse we have here of common union and common joy to which our fêtes and holidays nowadays can afford no parallel !

But the chief glory of these festal nights was the set-

¹ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 176.

² See quotation from Stowe in Sharp, *Mysteries*, 175.

ting forth of the armed watch.¹ This was not such an imposing spectacle in Coventry as in London, where the route extended," says Stowe, "to 3,200 Taylors yards of assize." The procession way was lighted by 700 cressets, and the marching watch numbered 2,000 men. Yet the Coventry folk made great preparation for their humbler show, which was undertaken, so said the drapers' craft with pardonable pride, "to the lawde and prayse of God and the worship of this city." All the craft fellowships met together to consult as to ways and means some days beforehand, "at the mayor's commandment," and dire penalties were laid on those who should refuse to attend on Midsummer night when the chief master sent his "clerk or sumoner" to warn them.² When all was ready for the procession, the worthy folk rode forth, two by two, each man in the livery proper to his calling, the least important brotherhood going first, the others following, each in their degree, until the train of fellowships closed with the mercers, the senior craft.³ The journeymen, perhaps on foot, followed their masters, and the chief folk of the corporation rode conspicuous in their scarlet cloaks, each one having an attendant torchbearer.⁴ But the chief glory of the procession was the sight of the watch riding in shining

¹ This was a universal custom, but there were special local feasts. For instance, at Canterbury, on the eve of the Translation of S. Thomas, a watch was kept. At Chester, Shrove Tuesday was a day for general merrymaking (Green, I. 149).

² Among the dyers, the penalty was 13s. 4d. (Sharp, *Mysteries*, 183.) ³ *Ib.* 160. ⁴ *Ib.* 184.

armour, and bearing battle-axes, swords and guns. Thus the dyers sent forth two clad in complete white armour, and four in brigandines, the drapers foure "in almayno revetts," while the smiths among others hired four, and the butchers made provision for six, armed men.¹ Moreover a crowd of minstrels and hirelings bearing cressets, torches, spears gay with pennons and bells,² streamers whereon were depicted the arms of the various crafts,³ and mirth-provoking figures of giants and giantesses,⁴ caused the streets to fill with colour, light, music and laughter. The citizens in the dusk of those June evenings beheld a right gallant show. There was the sound of minstrelsy, broken by a sudden discharge of guns,⁵ with the murmur of many voices and the tramp of many feet, and between the rows of densely packed crowd the torchlights glinted on the bright advancing line of the armed watch, or glowed on the stately figures of my masters the mayor, sheriffs and aldermen, arrayed in scarlet, bringing up may-be the rear of the train. In this manner did the good folk of Coventry celebrate the vigils of S. John

¹ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 193-4.

² *Ib.* 194.

³ *Ib.* 196.

⁴ The cappers paid 9d. for canvas to make a new skirt for the giant, and "xvid. for the mendyng of hys head and arme" (*Ib.* 201). The dyers also furnished a pageant wherein a hart and a herdsman blowing a horn figured. Perhaps this was a cause why they had been so long allowed to escape from providing a pageant on Corpus Christi day. See below, p. 242.

⁵ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 193. Drapers' Accounts, 1555, "payd to xviii gonmarys lxiis, iiijd.; payd for xxijth of gonepother, xijs. vjd."

the Baptist and S. Peter, according to the ancient custom of the city, until the changes of the sixteenth century, or the growth of Puritan feeling, or poverty, or a combination of all these, caused the observance to be laid aside. The riding on S. Peter's eve was discontinued after 1549,¹ though Midsummer eve was still celebrated by a procession for some years after that date.

On the morning of the Corpus Christi festival, before the Mystery Plays were acted, another procession of the crafts, more strictly religious in character than those we have described, also took place. Following the train of companies of traders and artificers came the members or priests of the Trinity guild bearing the Host, the various religious bodies of the city probably walking behind the Sacrament. The Corpus Christi guild provided gorgeous vessels, wherein the consecrated elements were placed, and four burgesses hired by the fraternity carried a canopy of costly material over the same, while the effect of the religious ceremonial was heightened by banner and crucifix coming from the treasuries of the guilds. A pageant setting forth the Annunciation, which, on account of its mystical meaning, was highly appropriate to the occasion, also figured in the train, and the records of the Corpus Christi guild show the payments made to the persons who represented S. Gabriel bearing the lily,² the

¹ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 184.

² "To gabriell for beryng the lilly iiijd." (*Ib.* 162).

Virgin with a crown of great price upon her head,¹ the twelve apostles, eight virgins, S. Margaret and S. Catherine. And the smiths caused the actor who was to represent Herod in their pageant to ride on horseback in a gorgeously painted coat in the procession.² After this portion of the festival was over, the craftsfolk set forth the famous Mystery Plays, whereof the fame filled Coventry from time to time with royal and noble visitors, and all the good folk of the surrounding country. Henry V., Margaret of Anjou, Richard III., Henry VII., and Elizabeth of York³ witnessed these shows, which, in the fifteenth century were at the height of their popularity, but soon after the Reformation the zeal of the Puritans and the rise of the secular drama caused all such performances to languish.

Each craft was required by the authorities to contribute towards the setting forth of a pageant at the festival. The more important fraternities—such as the mercers and drapers—were able to bear the expenses of furnishing stage scenery, paying actors, and providing suitable accessories without any aid from bodies outside their ranks. But among the lesser crafts it was usual for two,

¹ "Payd for a Crown of sylver and gyld for the Mare on Corpus xpi day xliijs. ix*d*" (Sharp, 161). ² *Ib.* 160-6.

³ *Ib.* 4-12. The assertion that Henry VII. viewed the plays acted by the Grey Friars in 1492 has given rise to some controversy. Dugdale asserts that the *Ludus Coventrie* was acted by the Grey Friars (*v. infra*, p. 344). But the plays or pageants exhibited by the trading companies formed an absolutely distinct cycle (Sharp, *Mysteries*, 7).

three or four to band together in order to lessen the individual burden,¹ while in all cases the journeymen probably contributed towards the expenses of their masters' pageant.² The task of adjusting these payments according to the means of the various inferior craft companies, was a delicate one, and often brought trouble upon the corporation. None of them cared to undertake the expenses and responsibility involved in the provision of a play. The smiths in 1428 petitioned the leet to be released from the burden;³ the dyers in 1496 could not be induced to take the load upon their shoulders;⁴ while for many years the skinners, fishmongers, cappers, corvesars, butchers, and others contrived to evade payment towards the support of a pageant, until a complaint arose from some of the contributory crafts that they were overburdened with charges consequent thereon.

This primary difficulty being overcome, the crafts took no little pains to make the representations as perfect as possible. They provided the dresses and stage furniture from their own funds, each company having a pageant-house, wherein these properties were stored. They paid the composer of the piece, if need were, or the copyist; the actors also, who were may-be lower craftsfolk, had a fixed hire, with "bread and ale" at rehearsals, and

¹ See *Leet Book*, f. 109, for the case of the cardmakers, saddlers, painters and masons.

² *Ib.* f. 27. The case of the weavers' journeymen, who paid 1d. a piece, is the only one on record. ³ Sharp, 8.

⁴ *Ib.* 9, 10. There is no record that the dyers ever contributed to the Mystery Plays.

between the repetition of the performance on the festival day in different quarters of the town. All were required by order of leet to play "well and sufficiently," "lest any impediment should arise" in the performance, under pain of 20s. to the town wall,¹ and in order that they might be perfect in their several parts, there were usually two, or in the case of a new play no less than five, rehearsals before the festival,² some of these taking place in the presence of the assembled fellowship, while the "keeper of the play book" attended, no doubt in the capacity of prompter.

There was, of course, no question of a theatre. The pageants were presented on movable stages, dragged from place to place by the hirelings of the various crafts, each play being repeated at each of the convenient points within the city, beginning with Gosford Street.³ The stage itself was divided into two parts; the actors dressed—and no doubt waited also, when their presence was not required on the stage—in the under part, where they were concealed by hanging cloths; the play was set forth on the upper part, which was open to the view, and furnished with suitable scenery, the walls in many cases being hung with tapestry and the floor strewn with rushes.

Unlike those of Chester and York, the plays represented by the Coventry mysteries were few in number,

¹ Sharp, 9.

² *Ib.* 20.

³ The second and third stations appear to have been at the end of Much Park Street, most likely the corner of Jordan Well, and at the New Gate, respectively (*Ibid.*).

and, it seems, formed a series illustrating the life of Christ, closing with His second coming on the Day of Judgment; whereas in the York cycle,¹ and the so-called *Ludus Coventrice*,² there are many representations of scenes drawn from the Old Testament. It is impossible to construct the whole series of the Coventry plays, for, save two pageants—that of the Sheremen and Tailors,³ and that of the Weavers⁴—all are missing, and in some cases the very titles of the plays cannot be recovered. The first pageant set forth was undoubtedly that of the guild of the Nativity, the company of tailors and shermen, representing the *Annunciation, the Birth of Christ, the Angels and the Shepherds, the Offering of the Magi, the Flight into Egypt, and the Murder of the Innocents*. The weavers' pageant, wherein was set forth the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, would follow as a matter of course. The titles of many pageants—those of the mercers, tanners, whittawers, and girdlers—are lost, but most likely the striking scenes in the life of Christ,

¹ See *York Mystery Plays*, ed. by Miss Toulmin Smith.

² Cott. MS. Vesp. D. VIII. This MS. of plays, which has been edited by Halliwell-Phillips, used to be identified, on very slender grounds, with those acted by the Grey Friars of Coventry. The MS. was shown to Dugdale by Cotton, probably in 1638, and on the strength of the fame, which had reached him, of the friars' acting at Coventry, and of the title, written in an Elizabethan hand, the historian of Warwickshire supposed it to be the Coventry cycle of mystery plays. It is now universally agreed that this cycle had its origin in the eastern counties; the dialect has no affinity with that of the Midlands.

³ Included in Sharp's *Dissertation on the Coventry Mysteries*.

⁴ *The Presentation in the Temple* (ed. Sharp), 1836.



DEMONS.

No. 1 is taken from a fresco in the Chapel of the
Holy Cross, Stratford-on-Avon ;

Nos. 2 and 3 are taken from old German wood-cuts.

such as the *Temptation*, the *Supper in the House of Simon the Leper*, or the *Raising of Lazarus*, formed the subject of these representations. The story of Christ's *Trial and Crucifixion* was the theme of the smiths' show,¹ the *Resurrection and Descent into Hell*² was enacted on the stage furnished by the cappers, and this, with the drapers' *Doomsday*,³ closes the list of the plays that are known to us.

One of the chief of the actors represented Pilate;⁴ he received 4s. for his hire from the smiths' company, whereas his fellow, the personator of Herod, received but 3s. 8d.;⁵ the former, too, drank wine in the intervals between the performances, while the minor players were refreshed with mere ale for the nonce. Both these above named were rampant characters, Pilate always possessing the organ of Stentor. The Herod of the shermen and tailors' play, who raged "in the pagond and in the strete also," was terribly arrogant and vindictive, and swore—a pardonable anachronism—"be Mahownde" (Mahomet).

Among the cappers' list of actors there is one which has about it a certain Miltonic grandeur; it is the "Mother of Death."⁶ It is to be regretted that *Doomsday* has not survived, for the names of the persons represented are very suggestive; two demons, two spirits were among them, two "worms of conscience," three black—or damned—souls, and three white—or saved—souls, and a Pharisee.⁷ The details of the stage property

¹ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 13.

² *Ib.* 45.

³ *Ib.* 66.

⁴ *Ib.* 32.

⁵ *Ib.* 28.

⁶ *Ib.* 47.

⁷ *Ib.* 66-7.

abound in naïf and grotesque allusions. Thus we learn that "3 lbs. of hair" was bought for the "Demon's coat and hose";¹ a "new hook" for hanging Judas was purchased at the cost of 6*d.*;² one Fawston received 4*d.* for "coc croyng," presumably "to startle the penitent Peter";³ while another hireling earned the same sum "for keypyng of fier at hell mouthe"⁴ from the drapers. This craft also purchased a "baryll," whereof the rolling might imitate the sound of the "yerthequake" on the Judgment Day.⁵

On certain occasions also the city put on its most gorgeous dress to welcome royal personages, particularly the princes of Wales, who, as the lords of Cheylesmore, were always looked upon as the special protectors of the city. An account will be found elsewhere of the reception of Margaret of Anjou and the little prince of Wales, afterwards Edward V. Arthur, prince of Wales, who came to the city in comparatively peaceful times, when the vexed question of the succession was settled, was greeted, not inappropriately, by the queen of Fortune, as well as the characters of S. George and king Arthur, at different quarters of the Cross Cheaping and Spon Street.⁶ Thirteen years after, in 1511, the prince's brother, king Henry VIII., who must have entered on the eastern side of the city, found at Jordan Well three pageants, embellished with the "nine orders of angels," to greet him. There were others, with "divers beautiful

¹ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 69.

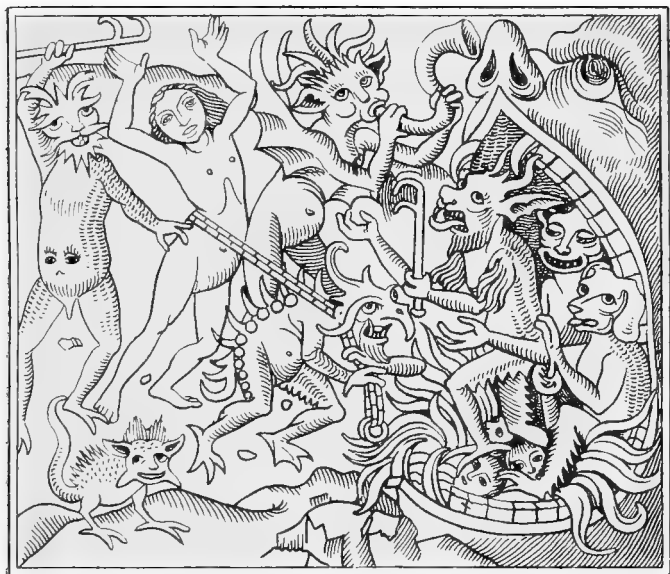
² *Ib.* 37.

³ *Ib.* 36.

⁴ *Ib.* 73.

⁵ *Ib.*

⁶ *Ib.* 146-57.



HELL-MOUTH.
(From an old German wood-cut.)

damself,” and “goodly stage play” upon them, but we have no record of the verses composed in the king’s honour.¹ The mercers’ pageant stood most gallantly trimmed at the Cross Cheaping in 1525 to welcome the princess Mary. This was before the divorce question had become the talk of Europe, and the daughter of Catherine of Arragon was still held in high honour; so that the citizens made great preparations for her coming, even taking down the heads and quarters of traitors from the gates lest they should annoy the lady’s sight.²

Fifty years later another sovereign witnessed a memorable performance of the Coventry men. On Hox Tuesday—the second Tuesday after Easter—certain games were held to commemorate, so the historians of the sixteenth century declared, the defeat of the Danes in the eleventh. These games, “invented” in 1416, fell into disuse soon after the Reformation, but were revived on the occasion of Elizabeth’s visit to Kenilworth in 1575. At that time certain “good harted men of Couentree,” led on by Captain Cox, alecunner and mason, presented the “olld storiall sheaw” before the queen, “whereat,” Laneham tells us in his delightful letter, written in the Warwickshire dialect, and quoted in Gascoigne’s *Princely Pleasures of Kenilworth Castle*,³ “her maiestie laught well,” while the players “wear the iocunder . . . becauz her highnes had giuen them too buckes and fiue marke in mony to make

¹ Harl. MS. 6,383, f. 26 verso.

² Sharp, *Mysteries*, 158.

³ See the account in Sharp, *Mysteries*, 126-32.

mery togyther." The play consisted in a sham fight between the English and the Danish "launzknights," but whether accompanied by recitations or no we cannot tell. "Eeuën at the first entree," says Laneham, who greatly enjoyed the fun, "the meeting waxt sumwhat warm. . . . A valiant captain of great prowes az fiers az a fox assauting a gooz, waz so hardy to give the first stroke: then get they grisly togyther: that great waz the activitee that day to be seen thear a both sidez: ton¹ very eager for purchaz of pray, toother² utterly stoout for redemption of libertie: thus, quarrell enflamed fury a both sidez. Twise the Danes had y^e better, but at the last conflict, beaten down, ouercom, and many led captive for triumph by our English weemen." The last detail was no doubt a compliment to the sex of her majesty, who was certainly proving that she shared in the mettle of these women of long ago, and who could laugh well—that great royal Tudor laugh—at the rude performances of her subjects.

Music was always a great feature of these pageants and processions. "Mynstralecy of harp and lute," or of "small pypis," or that of "orgon pleyinge," formed a part of the greeting which came to prince Edward from the stages whereon S. Edward, the prophets, or "the iii Kyngs of Colen" or "seint George" were shadowed forth.³ There were four chosen minstrels or city waits, and it may be remembered how on one occasion the mayor and aldermen sent for these and bade them go

¹ The one.

² The other.

³ Sharp, *Antiq.* 232.

before the throng making their way from Whitley to the city, "which is by the space of a mile largely or more," and pipe and play as they went, "like as the people had done a great conquest or victory." The waits played also on less stirring occasions than the opening of Bristow's meadows, being greatly in request at the banquets of the guilds and crafts,¹ and much sought after in all the country round. They wore silver chains and badges charged with the arms of the city,² and besides occasional fees given for their performance during feasts, they received a regular "quarteredge," that is to say, a penny from every citizen having "a hallplace," and a halfpenny from every one dwelling in a cottage four times a year for their maintenance.³

The citizens themselves delighted in music; some must have been practised singers, as the representation of the Corpus Christi pageants was diversified by songs. One of these, a lullaby from the tailors' and sheremen's play, of which the music has been preserved, is so pretty that it will well bear quotation.

"As I rode out this enderes⁴ night
Of thre ioli sheppardes I saw a sight,
And all a bowte there fold a star shone bright;
They sange terli terlow.
So mereli the sheppards ther pipes can blow.

¹ The carpenters in 1464 paid 8*d.* to the minstrels at the feast (Sharp, *Mysteries*, 213); the dyers paid 2*d.* (*Ib.* 214.)

² *Ib.* 209.

³ *Ib.* 207.

⁴ *i.e.* last.

Lully lulla, thow littell tini child,
By by lully lullay, thow littell tyné child,
By by lully lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do
For to preserve this day
This pore yongling, for whom we do singe,
By by lully lullay?

Herod the king in his raging
Chargid he hath this day
His men of might in his owne sight
All yonge children to slay.

That wo is me, pore child, for thee,
And ever morne and say
For thi parting nether say nor singe
By by lully lullay.

Doune from heaven from heaven so hie
Of angeles ther came a great companie,
With mirthe and ioy and great solemnitye
Thé sange terli terlow.
So mereli the sheppards ther pipes can blow."¹

The provision of these games, pageants and processions must have entailed great cost and labour, yet every member of the various fellowships helped to support them, and bore as well his part in the common labours and duties involved in his citizenship. Every one was compelled to obey the mayor's summons under penalty of a fine, whether called upon to come to the leet, or the council, or to help in the common labour of the town. In 1451, when wars were threatening, the call went round for all to come and aid in the work of cleansing the town ditch.² The summons went twice

¹ Sharp, *Mysteries*, 113-4.

² *Leet Book*, f. 154.

round the town according to the watch, we are told, "in right great charge and in speciall" to the poor folk, who had to leave their other occupations in consequence, besides paying their quota towards the taxes, which were necessarily heavy at that time. And the council hearing thereof ordered that £12 10s. should be collected from "thrifty" men to pay for the work, and the poor people spared, save that labourers earning 4*d.* a day were to pay 1*d.* or 2*d.* towards the required sum. In addition to their labour in the common defence, all citizens were required to make one of the company of watchmen when their turn came round, or to find a substitute. Fifteen men usually kept the nightly watch, but in times of disturbance their number was increased; thus in 1450 it was enacted that forty men of decent, good and honest communication and strong in body . . . shall nightly watch and guard the city from the ninth hour until the beating of the bell called daybell,"¹ and the light enabled all to see thief or enemy approach.

Neither were the citizens permitted to shirk the common military duties. At the "view of arms" all the freemen appeared in military accoutrement as suited their degree, and the threat of a siege turned artisans into soldiers and aldermen and councillors "for savegard of the cite" into captains of the wards and guardians of the gates. In 1469—the year of the battle of Edgcote—the city was changed into a very arsenal and barracks, so lively were the military preparations going forward

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 149*a.*

at that time. The city accounts show the heavy charges which the distribution of arms and armour entailed upon the public purse.

"Item," says the *Leet Book*, "delyvered to Robert Onley on Maudelyn day a serpentyne . . . for the Newe yate and a honde gunne with a pyke in the ynde and a fowler." To John Hadley for Bishop Gate "i staffe gunne." "Item delyvered to William Saunders, meyr, ii staffe gunnes and a grett gunne with iii chamburs, iii jacks and xxiv arowys." "Item . . . to John Wyldgris i gunne with iii chamburs to the fryrs' garden." There also follows the mention of the distribution of jacks and arrows to the various captains,¹ until possibly the supplies ran short, and the last obtained but "i newe jacke and a olde." In the "Lenton" of 1471 the scene was repeated. Guns and pelettes were again delivered to the captains for the gates, and money was hastily collected throughout the wards for the company of soldiers who followed my lord of Warwick to Barnet Field, whereby the citizens incurred king Edward's enmity and great displeasure.

The provision of soldiers according to the terms of the commissions of array, so common in civil warfare, were a heavy tax on municipal resources. When the city officers were ordered by the king's commission to send the local forces to join the royal army, the corporation had to "reteyn" their contingent, provide their dresses, badges and equipment, appoint a captain, and collect

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 205a.

money, according to assessment, throughout the wards for their pay. At the beginning of the civil war all went merrily enough, and the citizens threw themselves with right good will into the equipment of the soldiers who were to have gone to S. Alban's. But in a few years the artizans, called from their homes and business, were heartily weary of the continual strife, and clamoured for 12*d.* a day in payment. The hiring of recruits must have become a more difficult matter as time went on, though, like the clinching of all bargains in the Middle Ages, it was accompanied by plentiful drinking. The *Leet Book* records the following items in July, 1470, after Edward IV. had summoned a company of archers to a rendezvous at Nottingham: "dedit ad le sowders ad bibendum x*vid.*," . . . "a gallon wyne *vid.*," . . . "for ale to sowders *vid.*"¹ But even after the Wars of the Roses were over we have a sorry picture of the numerous inconveniences attending the hiring of troops. In February, 1481, Edward IV. sent commissioners to find out what money and what number of men the burghers would provide in the event of a Scotch invasion in the summer. After various discussions, commandings and countermandings, it was finally agreed that sixty men should be waged for the royal service for a quarter of a year at a cost of £150 10*s.*; recruits were found and arrows and salets distributed amongst them. More however was to be wrung from the reluctant burghers; £40 was collected from 180 of the "most sufficient" men of

¹ *Lcet Book*, f. 209*a.*

the town to provide horses and jackets for the soldiery.¹ But sixty archers were not deemed a sufficient contingent by the Court; and when in the following June lord Rivers came to know if the number could be increased, the mayor called a "Hall" of divers out of every ward to know what the common will was in this matter, and it was finally ordained that the citizens should equip and pay forty additional men, bringing up the number to 100. As all the recruits could not be drawn from the ranks of the townsfolk, the worthy men enlisted the service of strangers, and these had to be kept together, housed and fed, at great trouble and cost² until the time for departure. In the end, however, the levy was countermanded, and the troops thus laboriously collected were merely dispersed;³ a statement of facts the town clerk may be pardoned for recording in a murmuring and discontented spirit.

But however onerous these duties may have been, the Coventry men were loyally proud of their city and citizenship. Albeit a traveller, the mediæval merchant loved, as he loved nothing else on earth, the small stretch of land enclosed by the walls of his native town. He or his ancestors had won and maintained at great cost the city's liberties, and he and they spared no pains to make it beautiful. Historians are wont to despise the English

¹ *Leet Book*, f. 244a.

² 6*d.* a week was collected from all the citizens of the mayor's rank, and 4*d.* and 2*d.* from those of the sheriff's and warden's rank respectively to pay for the soldiers' board.

³ *Leet Book*, f. 246.

burgher of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, by reason of his insignificance and poverty, and his neglect of the highest forms of art, and pointedly contrast his small achievements with those of the merchant princes of Italy, or the proud and daring members of the Hanseatic League. It is true he was a commonplace person, living in what was for his country a commonplace age; nevertheless his doings are worthy of remembrance. If the English townsfolk never produced a Van Eyck or a Da Vinci, a Peter Fischer or a Donatello, they patronised all the local forms of art they knew. They had the same great delight in the common possession of a beautiful object as the people of the Italian republics. Though they lacked wealth to build themselves tall and stately houses like their brethren on the Continent, the English burghers could raise tall steeples, build vast churches, adorn their common halls, and rear exquisite crosses in the market place. The fifteenth century glass in S. Mary's Hall, Coventry, still attests the skill of William Thornton, a native of the city, and one of the first acts of the council of Forty-eight was to decree that a cross should be set up in the Cheaping, which was done, though at a cost of £50.¹ In Coventry, as elsewhere, the rich merchants and craftsmen set carvers to carve the miserere seats,—enjoying the grim humour these sometimes display, a quality which crops up everywhere in the fifteenth century, even now and then in legal documents,—and bade the engraver commemorate the

¹ *Leet Book*, ff. 18, 19a.

dead by tracing their effigies on brass, or the mason by fashioning their portraits in stone.

Neither should we regard as contemptible the Englishman's achievements in trade and travel. The Merchant Adventurers, in the teeth of the opposition of the Staplers and the Hanseatic League, first by piracy and chance trading and then by organized and chartered commerce, filled the North Sea with their ships, founded settlements at Bergen and Antwerp, and on the ruins of their rivals built up one of the most successful trading companies of northern Europe. English merchants carried from Crete or Lisbon the precious stores of eastern wine and spices, and brought their bales of wool to the port of Pisa to supply the makers of Florentine cloth, or to the ports of Normandy to supply the looms of northern France.¹

But it is not for his patronage of art or for his enterprise in foreign trade that the English burgher is chiefly noteworthy, but rather for his "politic guiding" of the cities in which he lived. Pirates, perhaps, on the Narrow Seas, he and his fellows were at home, for the most part, law-abiding men. A certain innate conservatism, a truly British love of appeal to custom and precedent, marks their rule, and, although the populace was frequently unquiet and discontented, the result was, on the whole, happy and successful. If the dangers of foreign commerce made them hardy and fearless, their political and civic life, with its manifold responsibilities, taught them

¹ Green, I. 90-120.

a prudence and worldly wisdom, which appears in all their transactions. Never were men who paid such heed to the Gospel precept, "Be ye wise as serpents." Liable to be deserted or oppressed by the king, thwarted by the open violence or secret maintenance of some great noble or the factiousness of some fellow-burgher, their self-reliance turned these necessities to "glorious gain." It is true that we meet with little heroism, and few distinct types of character. The men of this class can boast of no individuals who can be rightly considered as important historical figures. Like the great Gothic architects, these men, who built up such a flourishing and successful society, have been chary of leaving their names to us. Now and then, however, a bit of grimy and neglected parchment reveals a striking history. We see the clothes they wore and hear the words they said. The quarrel resounds once more in the guild-hall. The stern recorder testifies against the supposed factiousness of Laurence Saunders; and the aged men, lifting up their hands, swear to the ancient extent of the common pasture. These are not heroic or world-known scenes, but they represent the life of the citizens of an old-time city, men whose labours are not entirely forgotten.

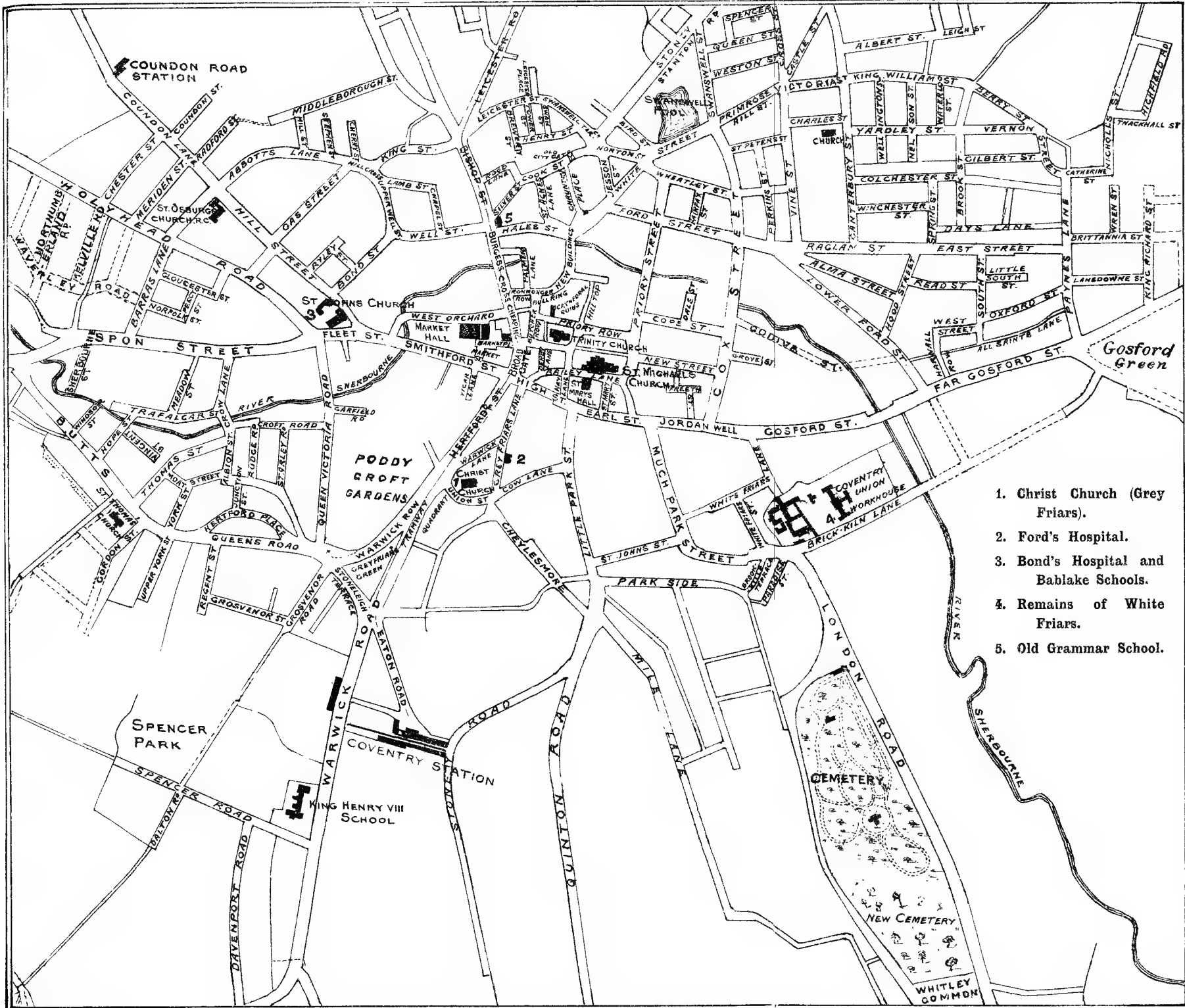
CHAPTER XVI

OLD COVENTRY AT THE PRESENT DAY

COVENTRY is well worth a whole day's visit, though the day may be an easy one, as the principal buildings lie very near together, and *are practically always open*, so that no time need be wasted ringing up this or that caretaker or running after the sacristan. Either the powers that be have little leisure to think of tourists, or they must be men of singular enlightenment, for I know of no place which can be seen so freely and cheaply, where lingering over a charming effect, a boss, inscription or painted window may be done with such pleasure because interruption is so rare.¹ The tourist will show his wisdom by not going too far afield in his sight-seeing; the three churches and S. Mary's Hall will, with a passing look at many a picturesque narrow street, carved gable, or interesting relic of old Coventry, furnish him with some hours' occupation. Those, of course, who possess indomitable physical and mental energy may ascend S. Michael's SPIRE for the view's sake, or brave a walk through the somewhat dreary environs of Coventry to the historic but commonplace-looking strip of land known as GOSFORD GREEN. Or, if they are proof against the depressing influence of the workhouse—for into this building the remains of the Carmelite monastery have been incorporated—may follow the line of Much Park Street to WHITE FRIARS, and there see the fine monastic cloister, which now serves as the paupers' dining-room.²

¹ This is a condition of things tourists ought to be thankful for; it is unhappily rare. S. Michael's closes at 5 o'clock in summer, 4 o'clock in winter; the other churches at 4 all the year round. The sight-seer ought to have an opera glass.

² I have omitted a description of the Charterhouse because it is private property.



1. Christ Church (Grey Friars).
2. Ford's Hospital.
3. Bond's Hospital and Bablake Schools.
4. Remains of White Friars.
5. Old Grammar School.

PLAN OF COVENTRY.

Castle and monastery have been destroyed in Coventry, and, after all, nobles and monks had very little to do with the making of the city, which, in 1381, was the fifth, and about seventy years later the fourth, among the cities of the kingdom. A fortunate junction of high roads, and the enterprise of the inhabitants, accounts for the great riches and large population during those seventy years. *And mark that the most noteworthy buildings were raised within this period:* the churches of S. Michael, and the Holy Trinity, and S. Mary's Hall. S. John's church is a little earlier in date. During this period the people of Coventry were possessed with a magnificent frenzy, such as shames our modern efforts, for building and making their city beautiful. That is to say, within a little over two generations the inhabitants of a town of what we should call nowadays contemptible smallness, for it contained at first a population of only about 7,000, and later certainly no more than 10,000 souls, raised two parish churches of unusual size, and a fine town hall. One of these churches is indeed the largest in the kingdom, and possesses a spire almost unrivalled in height and beauty. They also kept their fortifications in good repair during this period, and raised—to speak of inconsiderable trifles—a market cross, which has unfortunately perished, besides giving to all the buildings their bounty was making or had made, all the riches of suitable adornment that the carpenter's, carver's, painter's, glazier's, weaver's and goldsmith's art could devise. Much has perished in the destruction of the cathedral, the friars' and other chapels, the cross, a parish church, a guild-hall, and many unremembered buildings; but enough remains to show that we owe a great debt to those dear, dead folk who knew so many things we have forgotten and loved so many things we have ceased to care for, and, above all, knew what to do with stone and glass and metal, and loved their handiwork, for it was good.

In coming from the station down Warwick Row, as you pass the angle of Grey Friars' Green, look at the modern STATUE OF SIR THOMAS WHITE, merchant, lord mayor of London in 1555, founder of S. John's College,

Oxford, and benefactor of the city of Coventry. This is, I think, the only memorial raised to the famous dead connected with the city. Nothing tells that LAURENCE SAUNDERS, the Marian martyr, was led out to die in the park to the right of Christ church, the spire of which is close before you, or, as readers of the Elizabethan drama may care to know, that JOHN MARSTON, satirist, writer of plays, friend and foe of Ben Jonson, was born and lived here. Perhaps some day our cousins from over the Atlantic may raise a tribute to the memory of JOHN DAVENPORT, Puritan, of this city, who, after a troubled career as pastor in the city of London, fled to Amsterdam; and finally, in 1644, at the invitation of John Cotton, departed for New England, where he lived as pastor of Newhaven for twenty-five years; and, after much controversy concerning baptism, and writing of books, departed this life at Boston on March 13, 1669. Others may feel more interest in his brother or kinsman, CHRISTOPHER, a convert to Romanism, and hence the religious antipodes of the aforesaid John. After an education at Douay, this Franciscan friar became chaplain to queen Henrietta Maria, and subsequently to her daughter-in-law, Catherine of Braganza, wife of Charles II. He died in 1680, and was buried at the Savoy Chapel, London. Being suspected of designs for promoting the union of the English and Roman Churches, it was one of the indictments against archbishop Laud that he held frequent converse with Christopher Davenport. Other notable folk have at one time or another been connected with the city. SIR WILLIAM DUGDALE, Garter King-at-Arms under Charles II., author of the *Monasticon* and the *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, "maestro" and "autore" of all such as love the lore of the famous shire of Warwick, received his education at the Free Grammar School. While HUMPHREY WANLEY, to whose skill and knowledge the British Museum owes—not the gift—but the collection and arrangement of the Harleian manuscripts, while he held the post of librarian under Harley, earl of Oxford, in queen Anne's time, was son of a vicar of Trinity church.

Full in front is the view of the "three tall spires."

The nearest, that of CHRIST CHURCH, is all that remains of the far-famed chapel of the Grey Friars, wherein so many local notables and members of noble families lay buried. The church having been demolished at the suppression of the monasteries under Henry VIII., the steeple remained a solitary landmark until 1830, when the body of a new church was added. This is an uninteresting structure, and not worth a visit.

We are now inside the compass of the ancient wall, and those who wish to keep up old illusions, and enter the city by the ancient road, should turn up Warwick Lane, alongside of the Grapes Inn, avoiding modern Hertford Street, and so along Grey Friars' Lane to High Street and the main thoroughfare of the city. A little below the junction of the Warwick and Grey Friars' Lanes stands FORD'S HOSPITAL, a beautiful black and white timbered house with carved gables such as artists love. Some of the seventeen old women who are housed there, and daily bless, or should bless, the memory of John Ford, merchant of the Staple at Calais, may often be seen sitting in the little inner quadrangular court. The worthy Master Ford, by his will, dated 1509, made provision for six old men and their wives, "being nigh unto the age of threescore years and above, and such as were of good name and fame, and had been of good honesty and kept household within the said city, and were decayed and come to poverty and great need." Nowadays, however, it is only old women who profit by his benevolence.

On reaching High Street, which is part of the great north-west road, and the old coaching way between London and Holyhead, it is best to go right on down Pepper Lane, which immediately faces you, until you come to S. Michael's churchyard. This broad open space was, and is still, the centre of the life of the town. Here stood the cathedral and the two great parish churches, the house containing the cloth market, and the guild-hall, where the rulers of the city assembled to take council together. Possibly while the churches, as we know them now, and S. Mary's Hall were yet unbuilt, the common assembly of city folk met together here to hold courts, and decide on questions touching the common weal. Now the cathedral

and Drapery are gone, but the church spire still stands fronting the spectator, and a few paces will bring him where, behind the projection of a small black and white cottage, stands the red and crumbling entrance porch of S. Mary's Hall.

Tradition, which we can never afford to disregard, says that S. MICHAEL'S CHURCH—spire, tower, chancel, and nave, was built by the Botoners, a great merchant family, further affirming that a brass plate was found in the church, with the following lines engraved upon it:—

“William and Adam built the tower,
Ann and Mary built the spire,
William and Adam built the church,
Ann and Mary built the quire.”

Undoubtedly the Botoners were wealthy and generous folk, but whether this little quatrain is founded on fact or no, we have no means of proving.

The famous STEEPLE, whereof the tower, begun in 1371, occupied twenty-one years in building, is 300 feet high or thereabouts, but gains a fictitious appearance of greater height in that it springs immediately from the ground. The architect had a marvellously happy thought when he added the flying buttresses, which connect the pinnacles of the main tower with the octagon above it, converting a mere tall spire into a “star-ypointing” thing of lightness and beauty.¹ The stone figures in the niches are modern; the ancient ones, worth inspection though worn past identification, have been placed in the crypt, to which entrance is gained on the north side of the church. The steeple recently underwent restoration under Mr. Oldrid Scott, and whatever was gained in stability by the process, much was lost with the look of old age which vanished when the crumbling surface of the stone was scraped away.

Before entering the church by the south door notice the beautiful trefoil-headed arch of the SOUTH PORCH a few steps beyond, opposite the door of S. Mary's Hall. What first strikes the spectator on entering is the great size

¹ Contrast the outline of Trinity spire—work of the 17th century,

of the building, a fact mainly owing to the simplicity of the ground plan, no space being lost in transepts, and to the absence of any partition between nave and chancel, so that from the west end there is an uninterrupted view of the entire church. From this spaciousness and simplicity comes a grandeur which mere size could never wholly give. The style of architecture—of the kind called “Perpendicular”—shows that the fabric belongs to the first half of the fifteenth century. The width of the arches, and slightness of the pillars display the technical skill of the architects of this period, who, by a just distribution of weight, etc., contrived to raise churches of maximum size at a minimum expense of material and labour. It is a church where a large congregation may be comfortably housed, but it has the great defect of the later style of Gothic building,—all sense of mystery and aspiration, with which the lofty roof and high-pointed arch of the earlier periods impress the beholder, are wholly absent.

On looking down from the west end, a curious break in the line of the ROOF at the junction of nave and chancel is very apparent. The nave inclines to the north, probably because on the completion of the chancel it was found that there was not sufficient space for the necessary enlargements on the southern side.

The LANTERN at the west end has been opened out since the recent restoration, and the sight of the beautiful groining of the roof is not one that should be missed. The church is, however, poor in detail, having suffered from the zeal of reformers, and from the ignorance and carelessness of “Bumbledom” in the succeeding centuries. At the Reformation there came down a fellow with a “counterfeit commission,” and for “avoiding of superstition” tore up all the memorial brasses on the tombs, so that those that are left date from Elizabethan times—or later—and are of small interest. In a “restoration” of 1851 there was a regular “double twilight” among the tombs, which were taken up from their original resting-places, and deposited wherever the restorer thought fit. Amongst those thus displaced, and now standing at the west end of the north aisle, was the alabaster tomb of

JULIAN NETHERMYL, a worthy draper of the city, whose family entered the ranks of the squirearchy of Warwickshire, and bore arms like gentlefolk. In the front of the tomb is a bas-relief of Julian and his wife, with their five sons and five daughters, and the following inscription:—

“Hic jacit Julianus Nethermyl, pannarius, quondam Maior hujus civitatis, qui obiit xi die mensis Aprilis anno domini MDXXXIX., et Johanna, uxor ejus, quorum animabus propitietur Deus. Amen.”¹

The various crafts or trading companies had special chapels allotted to their use before the Reformation; the dyers, the present baptistery; the cappers, a little room over the south porch, where they still meet once a year, transact the company's business, eat, drink, and spread upon the table the venerable velvet cloth, which bears at its corners and in the centre a copy of the scissors which were the distinguishing mark of the cappers' calling, an interesting relic, albeit torn and faded, of the days when the making of cloth caps was one of the main industries of the city. The smiths and girdlers had chapels off the north aisle; and the drapers and mercers the space at the east end of the north and south aisles respectively. It was from its place among its fellows in the drapers' chapel that Nethermyl's tomb was brought, and many others stand behind a railing in the MERCERS' CHAPEL in the south aisle. Here is a much defaced erection, traditionally known as “Wayd's tomb,” and a most interesting relic of a city officer in the memorial to DAME ELIZABETH SWILLINGTON and her two husbands, one of whom, Ralph Swillington, was sometime recorder of the city. Round the tomb is the legend: “Orate pro anima Elizabethhe Swyllington, vidue, nuper uxoris Radulphi Swillyngton, Attornati Generalis Domini Regis Henrici octavi, Recordatoris Civitatis Coventrensis; quondam uxoris Thome Essex, armigeri; que quidem Elizabeth obiit anno domini millessimo CCCCC——.”² The worthy attorney-general and recorder lies on the side nearest the spectator; the squire, Master Thomas Essex, in armour, on the side

¹ Poole, 150.

² *Ib.* 142.

which is farthest off; Dame Elizabeth, her hand sadly mutilated, in the middle. The dame, the date of whose death is unknown, as the tomb was erected in her lifetime, lived at Stivichall, near Coventry, and gave £140 for the support of the poor and repair of roads in the neighbourhood of the city. Master Swyllington, who was made recorder in 1515, doubtless discharged his duties with all faithfulness, but I know of no memorable event in which he figures during his tenure of office.

In the DRAPERS' OR LADY CHAPEL, which is divided from the north aisle by an oak screen, we are continually reminded of the powerful Trinity guild, as well as the drapers' company, whose priests said daily service here. This part of the church was chosen as a burial place for the chief members of the latter society. In a brass plate let into the north wall of the chapel you may see the memorial inscription to the most notable of these:—"Here lyeth Mr. Thomas Bond, draper, sometime mayor of this cittie, and founder of the Hospitall of Bablake, who gave divers lands and tenements for the maintenance of ten poore men so long as the world shall endure, and a woman to look to them, with many other good guifts; and died the xviii day of March, in the yeare of our Lord God MDVI."

Bond's Hospital still stands by S. John the Baptist's church. May it endure—as the epitaph has it—as long as the world itself.

The dark oak ROOF of the chapel is ancient, and in some cases angels carrying shields are figured on the corbels. The first of these, at the east end of the north wall, bears, however, the Agnus Dei, a reference to S. John the Baptist, one of the patrons of the guild; the next a pelican "in her piety," *i.e.* feeding her young from her own breast, a symbol of Christ.

The MISERERE seats are worth inspection, though the carving is somewhat rough. They seem to fall into three classes, illustrating:—

1. *The labours of life.*
2. *The saints of the guild.*
3. *The certainty of death, and judgment to come, illus-*

trated by the favourite mediæval series, the *Dance of Death*.

They may be taken in the following order, beginning with the north wall :—

First series.—Labours of life.

1. A man thrashing; a man bat-fowling (agriculture and hunting).

2. Shepherd piping (pastoral life).

Second series.—Saints of the guild.

3. (*Defaced*.) Decapitation of a martyr, perhaps S. John the Baptist.

4. (*Defaced*.) The Assumption of the Virgin.

Third series.—Dance of Death.

5. A burial scene. Two men are laying the body, wrapped in a winding sheet, in an open grave; a priest, holding a torch in his hand, and two attendants stand near; mattock and spade are beside the grave.¹ On either side of the central carving Death is represented leading a mortal—in this case the pope—by the hand.

6. A man is being stripped of his shirt, symbolical perhaps of the fact that in dying we must relinquish all worldly possessions. A cripple, whom by the irony of fate Death has spared, watches the process of unclothing. The side subject has been cut off, but Death's companion is a bishop; see the outline of his mitre.

7. A death-bed scene; the sick person is in bed, his friends surround him.

8. The tree of Jesse. "The Word was made flesh."

9. The Last Judgment.

10. Grotesque.

11. The chaining of Satan.

12.

13. Grotesque.

14.

The church terminates in a five-sided apse, with five large, slightly pointed windows. The modern coloured glass of the three central ones is a miracle of ugliness, but the two outer ones are composed of fragments of ancient stained glass, out of which it is impossible,

¹ Poole, 145.

however, to distinguish any connected group. Figures of the cherubim standing on wheels are scattered about the various lights, still in fair preservation. Other fragments show the Apocalyptic Lamb, the kiss of Judas, and the description of the Trinity beginning, "Pater est Deus," etc.¹ In the CLERESTORY windows may also be seen more of these beautiful, but sadly fragmentary remnants of ancient glass. On one of these on the south side, the scissors, which were the mark of the tailors' and shermen's company, are conspicuous.

One more window, the third in the mercers' chapel, should be looked at—not for any artistic merit, but for the man it commemorates, Thomas Sharp, author of the *Antiquities of Coventry*, one of the most faithful workers in the field of antiquarian learning, whom it would be presumptuous to praise.

Painted on the BEAM above the coving which spans the nave between the rood piers are traces of an old Latin hymn on the nine orders of angels (a facsimile will be found in the vestry) :

"Archangeli presunt ciuitatibus.
Potestates presunt demonibus.
Dominaciones presunt spiritibus angelicis.
Cherubyn habent omnem scienciam.
Virtutes faciunt mirabilia.
Seraphyn ardent in amore dei.
Troni eorum est iudicare.
Angeli sunt nuncii domini."

Opposite the south porch of S. Michael's is the entrance to S. MARY'S HALL, the banqueting room and meeting-place of the guild of the Holy Trinity, S. Mary, S. John Baptist and S. Catherine, and the centre for the transaction of all municipal business. The great north window, of which the mullions bear trace of a recent restoration, is visible from the street, and from an opening in the front to the hall, long since blocked up, it was customary to proclaim the acts of leet passed by the fathers of the city to the crowd below. Built as it was for the honour and glory of this guild, whose members

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 58.

were the chief folk of the city, the building is full of detail reminding us of the patron saints of this fraternity. We shall see this more clearly later, when we come to examine the tapestry which hangs in the Hall itself. In the meantime note that the PORCH, which gives entrance to the court-yard, bears on its keystone a carving, representing the Coronation of the Virgin, and from one of the stones, whence the inward arch springs, is a sculpture of the Annunciation, now almost unrecognisable, save that on the inner side the feathers of S. Gabriel's wings are to be clearly made out. To the right of the court-yard, underneath the great Hall, is the entrance to the CRYPT, a beautifully proportioned chamber, with a plain groined roof, probably once a storehouse, now a receptacle for lumber. On the western side are cupboard-like openings in the wall, intended, Sharp thinks, to receive the deeds and valuable property belonging to members of the guild.

On the south side of the court-yard is the KITCHEN, full of memories of the great feasts which were once cooked there, and whence dishes were borne smoking hot up the stairs to the Hall above. Now the modern cooking appliances stand out in all their incongruity. The arches on the north side bear rudely sculptured figures of angels, each holding a shield on which is a merchant's mark, bearing the initials J. P., *i.e.* John Percy (living 1392), a benefactor of the guild.¹ Opposite to the crypt is the STAIRCASE, at the foot of which is a figure supposed to represent Henry VI., once placed on the long since demolished cross. On the ground floor is the NEW MUNIMENT ROOM. (For admission apply to the hall-keeper.) When inside the pretty little modern Gothic chamber, ask the hall-keeper to point out Ranulf's charter, and notice the beautiful twelfth century writing, which you can contrast with the more fanciful hand of the great charter of Edward III. The *Leet Book*, from which so much contained in this history has been

¹ Memorials of the visit of the British Archæological Institute in 1864. The kitchen is part of the original building, and belongs to the middle of the fourteenth century.



Chair in S. Mary's hall.

CHAIR OF STATE, S. MARY'S HALL.
(From an Old Print).

obtained, stands on one of the bookshelves which line part of the room. The municipal scales, engraved with the "Elephant," the city arms, are also visible in an inner compartment of this chamber.

If the council is not sitting, the hall-keeper will also show the MAYORESS'S PARLOUR, on the upper floor. Here stands the CHAIR OF STATE,¹ used on great occasions, probably by the mayor and the master of the guild. Only half remains of this magnificent relic. No doubt the side where the guild-master took his seat was sawn off, cast aside as useless on the suppression of this "superstitious" society at the Reformation. The chair bears on one side a figure of the Madonna, "the arms of Coventry surmount the back on the one side, and on the other (which was the centre in its complete state) are two lions rampant supporting a crown."² Several portraits line the room, those of John Hales, founder of the Free Grammar School, of Christopher Davenport, mayor of the city, and Sir Thomas White, are of great local interest; but undoubtedly the most artistic is a curious portrait of queen Mary, said to be by Zuccherro or Antonio More.

As the GREAT HALL³ served as a banqueting-hall for the Trinity guild, a flight of steps at the south end communicates directly with the kitchen. At the north end was a dais, where the principal guests took their seats. The room was also used for municipal purposes, particularly when the town rulers found it necessary to convoke a large assembly of their fellow-citizens. Many a stormy scene has this beautiful room witnessed. Here it was—or in an earlier hall—that the common folk, enraged at the bad quality of bread, threw loaves at the mayor's head when he neglected to punish the frauds of the victuallers. Here Laurence Saunders defied or submitted to the dictates of the corporation, and the citizens met together promising to uphold the mayor and council in their attack on William Bristowe, who had encroached

¹ See illustration opposite.

² Sharp.

³ The architecture of the Great Hall shows it was raised after 1392, when the union of the guilds took place.

upon the Lammas lands. Here the mayor was elected and courts held. But when the council met, they chose a smaller room communicating with the Great Hall, for privacy's sake.

The right way to study the Hall is to mount the little flight of steps at the southern end, and, sitting in the MINSTREL GALLERY, behind the array of Cromwellian armour, examine the glorious fifteenth century WINDOW at your leisure. A few years back the glass was in utter confusion, having been carelessly replaced after re-leading, and the respective heads, bodies and legs of the magnanimous conquerors and kings therein commemorated were sadly astray, their anatomy being rendered thereby most perplexing. This has, however, been judiciously remedied, and we can now clearly see in the nine compartments—as the artist, William Thornton, designed—the figures of the emperor Constantine, king Arthur, William I., Richard I., Henry III., Edward III., Henry IV., Henry V., and Henry VI., the last occupying the place of honour in the central light. Above are the arms of various nobles and cities, among others the “elephant and castle” of this city, the three “garbs,” wheat-sheaves of Chester, and the sable eagle of earl Leofric, the city's earliest benefactor.

The dark oak ROOF belongs also to the fifteenth century, and is worth, even at the cost of some strain to the muscles of the neck, a careful study. At the centre of each beam are whole-length figures of angels, ten in number, of whom eight are playing on various instruments. The first, close to the great north window, has a violin-like instrument, the second a harp, the third a flute, the fourth a flute, but of a peculiarly flat shape, the fifth a violin, the sixth a curved tube, the seventh a tabor, the eighth a curved tube, while the ninth and tenth have no wings or instruments at all; possibly they represent the “morning stars singing for joy.”

Under the great north window hangs a piece of TAPES-TRY, dating, so say experts, from the beginning of the sixteenth century. It is of Flemish design, and was woven, possibly in England, with the intention of filling the place it now occupies. Faded in colour, often blurred in outline,

the tapestry still remains a glorious memorial to the love of beauty and artistic workmanship and corporate pride of the great guild. It is divided into six compartments, and represents a king, queen, and their Court adoring the Virgin, the Trinity, and divers saints in glory. Naturally among the company of saints the place of honour is given to those who were the chosen patrons of the guild. Unfortunately the tapestry has not come down to us in the condition in which it left the makers' hands. The figure of Justice holding the scales is obviously out of harmony with the whole design. There is no doubt that the personification of the Trinity, God the Father on the throne holding Christ extended upon the Cross, with the Dove, once occupied this space. The Hebrew letters of the word Jehovah found above the cross still remain, but the reformers, who could not endure the representation of this mystery, cut out the rest.¹ Round the present incongruous figure of Justice, kneel angels bearing the instruments of the Passion, the nails, the sponge of hyssop, the crown of thorns, the scourge, pillar and spear. The Assumption of the Virgin in the lower central compartment reminded the guildsmen of their earliest patroness, whose festival was one of their chief days of assembly. The Virgin's feet rest on the crescent moon, which is supported by an angel. The apostles kneel round in attitudes of adoration. On either side of the lower tier a king kneels in prayer, on the right a queen, two figures which have been identified with Henry VI. and Margaret of Anjou. Both were members of the Trinity fraternity, and the tapestry was probably designed to celebrate their admission into the ranks of the guild. The hypothesis that the pair may be intended for the then reigning Henry VII. and his queen, Elizabeth of York, is untenable, as the heraldic roses in the border are Lancastrian and not Tudor. The king kneels at a table whereon lie a crown and missal; he wears a jewelled cap. None of his followers can be identified save the kneeling cardinal, who probably is

¹ Sharp, *Antiq.* 221.

intended for Beaufort, bishop of Winchester, and the standing figure behind the king, who may be the "good duke Humphrey." Queen Margaret kneels opposite. None of her ladies can be identified, but we may easily conceive that some of her train were intended to pourtray her constant attendants, the duchess of Buckingham and the elder and younger lady Shrewsbury. The queen has a head-dress embroidered with pear pearls, upon which is a crown of fleur-de-lis; her dress is yellow, and the sleeves lined with ermine.

In the upper left-hand division is a group of male, on the right-hand a group of female, saints respectively led by the patrons of the guild, S. John the Baptist and S. Catherine. The former are the less interesting company; they consist of S. John the Baptist bearing the book and *Agnus Dei*; the next is probably S. Thomas, holding a lance. There follow S. Paul with a sword; S. Adrian, patron of brewers, standing on a lion, and holding a sword and an anvil, instrument of his martyrdom; S. Peter with the key; S. George holding a banner, but, oddly enough, with no dragon at his feet; S. Andrew with a transverse cross; S. Bartholomew with a knife; S. Simon with a saw; and S. Thaddeus with a halberd. In the opposite division stands an array of saints in charming Tudor dress; S. Catherine with her wheel; S. Barbara with the tower; S. Dorothea with the basket of roses; S. Mary Magdalene with the vase of ointment; S. Margaret, name-saint of the queen who kneels in the compartment beneath, with a queer, flabby, spotted demon curling round her body; S. Agnes with a delightful little lamb, which she holds by a string. Then follows an abbess; concerning whose identity there has been much discussion. She is arrayed in a monastic habit, bears a crozier, and has three white mice about her person, one on either shoulder, and another springing in the air above. This is S. Gertrude of Nivelles in Flanders,¹ patroness of travellers, and may-be also of the locality where the tapestry was designed. Noted far and wide for hospitality in

¹ See Mr. Scarf's paper quoted in Sharp, *Antiq.* 222.

her lifetime, the saint did not cease her ministrations to wayfarers after death. The journey to Paradise is a long one, occupying three days, so that the popular fancy said that the souls slept with S. Gertrude on the first night, with S. Gabriel on the second, and the third they rested in Paradise. "The saint therefore became," says Mr. Baring Gould, "the patroness and protector of departed souls. Next because popular Teutonic superstition regarded rats and mice as symbols of souls, S. Gertrude is represented in art as attended by one of these animals. Then, by a strange transition when the significance of the symbol was lost, she was supposed to be a protectress against rats and mice, and water from the crypt at Nivelles was distributed for the purpose of driving away these vermin."¹ It may be noted that the two nuns in the compartment of ladies attending upon the queen, wear the same habit as S. Gertrude. The next saint of the company is usually identified with S. Anne, but on what grounds I am unable to discover. She bears a long staff (or taper) in her hand. Now the saint likely to be associated with S. Gertrude would be her godchild, S. Gudule, patroness of the cathedral of Brussels. Her appropriate symbol is, however, a lantern.² But the artist is not very careful about these, and possibly may have substituted the taper.³ In this case the demon hovering over S. Apollonia, who follows next, bearing her pincers, really belongs to S. Gudule, and is a reminiscence of the saint's nocturnal difficulties in keeping her lantern alight, so persistently did the evil spirit blow it out.⁴

After examining the tapestry there is little to detain you. The oriel window contains some fragments of old glass, and there is an oak sideboard in its recess. The inscriptions about the Hall are reproductions of Elizabethan black letter. A brass commemorating the

¹ Baring Gould, *Lives of the Saints*.

² Husenbeth, *Symbols of Saints*.

³ Or it may be S. G  nevi  re, patroness of Paris, of whom a similar story is told.

⁴ It would be well if this beautiful relic were kept under glass for its better preservation.

lease of Cheylesmore Park, granted to the citizens by the duke of Northumberland in the reign of Edward VI., is fixed in the wall close to the entrance to the Mayoress's Parlour. As for the terrible windows, filled with glass in 1826 in imitation of the old work, which had been destroyed in an affray concerning a contested election of 1780 known as the "bludgeon fight," let us not speak of them. In a little room on the southern end is a carving of S. George and the Dragon, which was brought from S. George's Chapel on the Gosford Gate.

Crossing the churchyard, you arrive at TRINITY CHURCH, which suffers in its exterior from the neighbourhood of S. Michael's, but the interior is of earlier and more finely proportioned architecture than its giant neighbour. Rebuilt at the close of the fourteenth century on the site of a parish church, which existed at least as far back as the reign of Henry III., this building is also somewhat poor in detail. The fresco of the Last Judgment which could once be discerned above the chancel arch is now obliterated. As in S. Michael's, the mullions of the clerestory windows are continued to the top of the arches of the nave, forming a series of stone panels. The stone PULPIT is probably contemporary with the building of the church. The LECTERN, which is also antique, aroused the suspicions of the Puritans, and in 1654 there was some talk of selling it, a transaction which was happily not accomplished, though the "eagle" at S. Michael's, the gift of William Botoner, had been sold at so much the pound a few years previously. Not a vestige now remains of the ancient stained glass which once made the church beautiful. Its disappearance was owing not perhaps so much to Puritan zeal as to the deliberate action of the authorities in the last century. From 1774 to 1787 the masons of Coventry must have revelled in the work of mutilating the window traceries, and the old glass after being taken down was never put back. The old sexton told the antiquarian Sharp particulars of the famous window, wherein Leofric and Godiva were represented, the former holding a charter with the words:

“I Luriche, for the Love of thee,
Doe make Coventre Tol-free.”

But this was removed in 1779; and on my last visit to Coventry I saw that the few past fragments of old glass had disappeared from a window in the north wall.

To the north of Trinity churchyard are the CATHEDRAL RUINS. Little more than the bases of a few fine pillars are left of the once splendid minster, dedicated to S. Mary, S. Peter, S. Osburg, and All Saints. From the gates of Trinity church you pass the top of the picturesque BUTCHER ROW, and, if time does not fail you, may turn down Cross Cheaping—alas that the cross should be no longer there!—till you come to the OLD GRAMMAR SCHOOL, at the corner of Hales Street. This was the ancient home of the Hospitallers, who tended the infirm and sick, but was converted after the Reformation into a free grammar school. It is now a parish room;¹ but round the walls of the ancient chapel of the Hospitallers are the old stalls they once occupied, cut and hacked by many generations of schoolboys. Here Dugdale received his education; also the Davenports and a great many more who have never risen to fame in the world. Mr. Tovey, father of Milton's Cambridge tutor, and Philemon Holland, translator of Camden's *Britannia*, the “translator-general of his age,” were masters here.

On returning up the Broadgate to the cross roads give a glance at the authentic “PEEPING TOM” looking out of a window in the top storey of the King's Head Inn. The figure is far older than the legend, which dates only from the eighteenth century. It is a full-length wooden statue of a man in armour, with helmet, greaves, and sandals; the arms are cut off at the elbows. What the statue anciently represented is, I believe, unknown.

The turning to the right, Smithford Street, leads to S. JOHN'S CHURCH, another building raised to the glory of God and the guild of the Holy Trinity, S. Mary, S. John Baptist, and S. Catherine. Built on ground

¹ Mrs. Garner, 2nd Court, right-hand side in Well Street, keeps the key, but the place is not worth spending much time on.

given in 1342 by Isabella, wife of Edward II., to the fraternity, this beautifully proportioned little Perpendicular church also lacks any wealth of interesting detail. It was not a parochial church, but reserved for the ministration of the college of priests, which were supported by the fraternity until Reformation times.

Close by the churchyard, forming the view of all views to be dwelt on in the city, stand two picturesque black and white timbered houses, one given by John Bond for an almshouse for aged and decayed folk recommended by the Trinity guild, and the other the Bablake school, raised by the benevolence of Mr. Wheatley in the sixteenth century. The sight of these houses, grandly planned and strongly built, with lovely gables where barge-board and finial are marvels of the house-carver's art, is a fitting close to a day in Coventry. Let us hope that no restorer, modern builder, well-meaning vestry or enterprising commercial man will ever rob us of the loveliness of Bond's Hospital and Wheatley's school at Bablake.¹

¹ This has, alas! been done since the above was written, by the erection of a modern house. The view of one of the most picturesque groups of domestic buildings in England has been ruined.

APPENDICES

ON THE MS. AUTHORITIES EMPLOYED

ALTHOUGH the fire at the Birmingham Free Library in 1879 destroyed the valuable collection of MSS. made by the antiquary, Thomas Sharp, there still remain in the possession of the corporation of Coventry many valuable documents, the chief source of information from which the history of the city is to be gathered. The more important of these were catalogued by Mr. Cordy Jeaffreson in 1896, and arranged under the following heads: (A) Books; (B) Charters, Letters patent; (C) Deeds, leases, etc.; (D) Curial records; (E) Rolls and files; (F) Miscellaneous matters. Among these the first *Leet Book* (Corp. MS. A. 3a) is of supreme interest. Save for some extracts referring to the city buildings, pageants, processions, etc., which Sharp incorporated into his *Antiquities of Coventry*, and *Dissertations on the Coventry Mysteries*, and one or two casual references in Poole's *Coventry*, this bulky folio of over 340 pages, written in various hands, containing a yearly account of matters ranging from 8 Henry V. to 1 and 2 Philip and Mary (1421 to 1554-5), has been hitherto left untouched. We find recorded there year by year the election of the mayor and the city officials, with the names of the twenty-four electors; the names of the twenty-four jurors of the court leet which met at Easter and Michaelmas; the regulations framed by this court, and much miscellaneous matter. In the last-named category may be mentioned the account given of the reception of royal persons, the chronicle of passing events with which the writer occasionally favours us, the enrolment of the rules of various crafts, or of the extent of the Lammas pastures, and the like. Next in importance is probably the folio of Humphrey Burton (Corp. MS. A. 34). The writer was town clerk in the first half of the seventeenth century, and in order to obtain evidence for a lawsuit then pending between the prince of Wales, son of James I., on the one hand, and the corporation on the other, ransacked the city archives and the records in the Tower of London, entering all bearing upon this case in this volume, of which a transcript, referred to here as Burton . .

MSS., is to be found in the Coventry Free Library. By this means, the purport of many deeds lost in the Birmingham fire, particularly those referring to the quarrel between the prior and queen Isabella, have been preserved for us. In Burton's hand, too, is a smaller volume, relating to the collection of ship-money in the reign of Charles I. (Corp. MS. A. 35). The records of the Trinity guild were burnt, but those of the Corpus Christi still survive (Corp. MS. A. 6), though they are a mere record of the names of, and fines paid by, the guild members, with the receipts and expenses of the fraternity from 1488 to the time of its suppression. Two volumes of correspondence (Corp. MS. A. 79) contain much interesting matter on subjects ranging from the time of Edward III. to the Hanoverian period. Here are to be found autographs of royal persons, eminent and unknown townsmen, and various notable people, of whom we might mention the Lady Margaret, mother of Henry VII., and Prince Henry, son of James I., two signatures which are perhaps unique, Henry VIII., Wolsey, Cranmer, Laud, Sir Thomas White, Endymion Porter, Juxon, Richard Baxter, and others.

Among the rolls and files may be noted the remains of a statute merchant roll for the recognition of debts (Corp. MS. E. 6), extending from 15 Richard II. to 3 Henry V. with detached membranes belonging to the reigns of Henry VI., Henry VIII., and later kings.

Although the two earliest charters relating to Coventry, those of Edward the Confessor and William I. to the monastery, are in the British Museum, many others, dating from Henry II onwards, are in possession of the corporation. Humphrey Wanley's *Diary* (Harl. MS. 6,466) contains matters relating to Coventry, as is the case with the Patent and Close Rolls in the Record Office, though the information the latter contain is also generally to be found in the archives of the city.

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INDEX

- ANNOTSBUURY**, guild at, 89.
ABINGDON, monastery at, 3; letter sent to, 188.
ÆLFGAR, 10.
AFFILIATION of boroughs, 41 note.
ALCESTER, 14.
ALCHEMIST, an, 288.
ALDERMEN, appointment of, proposed, 152; try pleas, 97 and note, 98 note; their search for unruly, 330; for vagabonds, 318.
ALDGYTH, 11.
ALE-TASTERS appointed by bailiff, 295.
ALE-WIVES, 276, 297.
ALGARBE, 296.
ALMSHOUSE, 323; founded at Bablake by Bond, 312; at Grey Friars' by Ford, 312.
ALTON, brigands of, 309.
"ANGEL" inn, 169, 307.
ANNUNCIATION, pageant of, 310.
ANTWERP, 80.
APPRENTICES, swear to franchises, 240, 241, 273, 274; morals of, 274, 329, 330; number of, limited, 271, 272; on receiving, masters pay fine, 271; on setting up shop, pay fine, 272, 273, and note; treatment of, 274.
ARCHERY, 328.
ARDEN, forest of, 13, 284.
ARMED watch, riding of, on Midsummer and St. Peter's eves, 338-340.
ARMOUR provided by citizens, 151; delivered to captains, 352.
ARMS, view of, 351.
ARTHUR, prince of Wales, 346.
ASHEBURNTON, school at, 315 note.
ASSIZE of ale, 294; of bread, 49, 76, 106 note, 135, 294, 295; of cloth, 87, note.
ASSUMPTION, guild of the, 93 note.
AUDLEY, lord, 168.
AULNAGE, 254 note.
AULNAGER, 87 note.
AUMBRY, children of the, 315.
BABLAKE, church of St. John the Baptist at, *see* Churches; Hospital, *see* Almshouse.
BAGINGTON, 12 note, 131, 296.
BAGOT, Sir William, 131.
BAILIFFS, duties of, 104; misdeeds of, 121; *see also* Sheriffs.
BAKERS, offend against assize of bread, 106 note, 107; company of, survives, 281 note; take sanctuary at Bagington, 296; rules of, 299 note.
BALL, John, taken at Coventry, 135; discourse of, 136.
BANBURY, 179, 187; Puritan feeling at, 329.
BARNET FIELD, 186, 188.
BARNSTAPLE, 43 note.
BARON'S FIELD, 206 note, 208, 218.
BASTARDE, wine, 296.
BATH, Roman town, 2; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note.
BATTLE, trial by, 51.
BEAM, wool weighed at the, 299.
"BEAR and Baculus" inn, 307.
BEAR-BAITING, 328.
BEAR-WARD, 104, 329.
BEAUMONT, lord, 156, 165.
BEDFORD, 135; duke of, 145; duchess of, 145, 185.
BEDON, William, quarrels with Huet, 124-6.
BELL, church, 196, 284 and note; day-bell, rung at dawn, 282, 284 note, 351; "larum" bell, 163.
BENEDICTINES, their love of sheltered spots, 13; order of, 14, 15; houses of the order, 15; life among the, 10-22; habit of, 285.
"BENEVOLENCES," 192.
BERKELEY, family of, owners of Redcliffe, 57; feuds of, 148, 167; James, lord of, 148; Sir Maurice of, 53.
BERKSWELL, 289 note.
BILLS, *see* Leet.
BISHOPRIC of Coventry, title of, 204.
BISHOPS of Coventry, *see* Coventry.
BLACK PRINCE, charter of, 86.
BLACK DEATH, 291.
BLOOD, Holy, of Hayles, 286.
BLOREHEATH, battle of, 168.
"BLUE BOAR" inn, 307.
BLUE thread, decline of trade in, 254; special colour used in dyeing, 302.
BOLINGBROKE, Henry, 130, 131.
BOND, John, 258; *see also* Almshouse.
BOND'S Hospital at Bablake; *see* Almshouse.
BONFIRES on St. John's eve, 337.
BONVIL, lord, 148.

- Books sold at fairs, 303.**
BORDARS, 31 note.
Boston, fair at, 132; ship of, 310.
BOSWORTH FIELD, battle of, 194, 307.
BOTELEH, Henry, see Recorders.
BOTONER, family of, trade with Bristol, 307, 308; build St. Michael's steeple, 307, 308; purchase estate, 308.
BOTONER, Adam, 308.
BOTONER, William, 308.
BRACKMEN, workers in iron, 266-268.
BRASS, memorial, to Sir William Bagot, 131.
BRAWLS, 331, 332-334.
BRAYTOFT, Richard, 211.
BREAUTÉ, Faulkes de, 134-135.
BREDON, Friar John, opposes the hermit's preaching, 141; attacks monks, 326-328; recantation of, 327, 328; nails bills on the church door, 327.
BRETHERN, of the mayor, 244; see also Mayor's Council.
BREWERS, forbidden take water from conduits, 293; forestall barley, 297; trade of, lucrative, 297.
BRIBBERY of officials, 105, 163 note.
BRIDGEWATER, church at, 320.
BRIGANDS of Alton, 309.
BRISTOL, division of land in, 57; arrest of a burgess of, 58; cannon brought from, 152; trade with 257, 301, 307, 308; toll demanded at, 308.
BRISTOWE, John, draper, 206, 258; mayor, 207; encroaches on common lands at Whitley, 207-208, 217; drives cattle on Coventry pastures, 208.
BRISTOWE, William, of Whitley, 206, 208; offends the corporation, 208-209; the mayor and citizens break into his 'closes, 210-212, 214; breaks into the closes occupied by Pere and Squire, 213; appeals to the privy council, 213; suit between, and the community about the ownership of enclosed lands, 215-218; surcharges commons, 222; keeps meadows, several, 232, 233, 234; further suit, 235-236; see also Whitley.
BRIGES, staple for cloth at, 309.
BUCKINGHAM, duchess of, 166.
BUCKINGHAM, duke of, Humphrey Stafford, quarrels with Coventry men, 149; retainers and badge of, 149, 285; power of, 149, 150; attends Henry VI., 155, 165; assists duke of York to escape, 163; visits Coventry, 169; dies at Northampton, 170; his castle of Maxstoke, 333 (il.).
"BULL" inn, 307.
BULL-BAITING, 328.
BULL-RING, poulterers stand near the, 299; bulls baited in, 328.
BURGAGE, free, 43.
BURGUNDY, wool trade with, 175, 185, 186.
BURTON, Humphrey, town-clerk, 4 note.
BURY St. EDMUND's, monastery at, 3, 15; guild at, 54 note, 65 note; men of, get concessions from the abbot, 69; rise against abbot, 55; fair at, 132.
CADE, Jack, 151; quarters of, exposed on town gates, 290.
CARN, abbeys at, 3.
CALAIS, 178, 182; see also Staple.
CALUDON Castle, 131.
CAMBRIDGE, guild at, 69.
CANDLES, funeral, 326-327.
CANNOCK CHASE, robbers at, 310.
CANONS, see Lichfield.
CANTERBURY, monastery at, 15; size of, at Domesday, 31 note; divisions in, 57; archbishop of, 251; Arundel, 137, 138; Peckham, 327 note.
CANTILUPE, Fulk de, 27.
CAPPERS, 254, 255 note, 271; company of, survives, 281; fines for admission to freedom of craft of, 273 note; treatment of apprentices among, 274; see also Apprentices, Chapel, Journeymen, Pageants.
CAPS, making of, by journeymen forbidden, 280.
"CARDINAL's Hat" inn, 307.
CARDMAKERS, fellowship of the, 261 note; bill concerning abuses of the, 266-269; see also Journeymen.
CARDS for wool-combing, 267.
CARD-WIREDRAWERS, see Cardmakers.
CARMELITES, habit of, 285.
CARPENTER, John, of London, 312.
CARPENTERS, apprentices of, 280; feasts of, 336, 349 note.
CARTHUSIANS, order of, 15; house of, at Coventry, 15; habit of, 285.
CARTWRIGHT, Presbyterian, at Warwick, 202.
CASTLE, feudal lord's, 33.
CASTLE of Coventry, destroyed by Stephen, 35.
CATESBY, John, 215, 217.
CATHERINE of France, queen, 139.
CATTLE impounded, 223; in streets, 283.
CHAMBERLAIN, duties of, 104, 223; petition of the, 222; Roger a Lee refuses to fill the office of, 100; see also Saunders, Laurence.
CHAPEL Fields, 37.
CHAPEL of S. George on the Gosford Gate, 326 note.

- CHAPEL of S. Mary Magdalene, at Spon, 37.
- CHAPELS of the crafts in the parish churches, 324, 326 note.
- CHARD, 188.
- CHARITY of the merchants, 312; of the Corpus Christi guild, 313; of the corporation, 318.
- CHARLES I. is refused entrance to Coventry, 203.
- CHARLES II. remodels town charters, 81; orders the walls to be dismantled, 204.
- CHARTER, granted to corporation, 86, 118, 119, 157; to Earl's-men, 45, 46, 60, 64, 65, 72, 73, 74, 77 note, 83, 84; to prior, with license to form merchant guild, 60, 61.
- CHARTERHOUSE, at London, 15; at Coventry, 15, 328; *see also* Carthusians.
- CHEPSTOW, 180.
- CHESTER, bishop's seat transferred from, 22; canons of, 25; S. Werburgh's at, 7 note, 8 note; earls of, 32; Hugh rebels against Henry II., 35, 36; builds lazaret-house, 37; Hugh Lupus, 33; Ranulf Blonvil's career, 37-39; gives charter to burghers, 45; protects Jews, 52; Ranulf Gernons, his career, 34-35; Ranulf Meschines, 32, 34.
- CHRYLESMORE, officers of, 86, 124; becomes royal manor, 130; Park of, man arrested in, 122; citizens quarry in, 87; earl of Chester's dwelling at, 129 note, 133; princes of Wales at, 139, 191.
- CHIMNERS, wooden, 293.
- CHURCHES, uses of, 319, 320; converted into hospitals, 320, 321; of Coventry, 327.—S. John the Baptist's at Bablake, built by Trinity guild, 92, 322; priests of, 156.—S. Michael's, bell brought to, 195, 196; chapels of crafts in, 323-325; door of, verses nailed to, 245, 320; priests of guilds employed in, 92, 93; royal visits to, 155, 156, 204; sale of cloth in porch of, 241.—S. Nicholas, supported by Corpus Christi guild, 201 note; chaplains of, 322 note.—Holy Trinity, building of, 321-322 note; fresco in, 323; priests employed in, 93, 322 note.
- CHURCHYARD, S. Michael's, 46, 299.
- CLAPHAM, 179, 290.
- CLARENCE, duke of, George, conspires with Warwick, 177, 178; pledges jewel, 181; deserts Warwick, 187; mediates with Edward IV. for Coventry men, 188, 189.
- CLARENDON, 128.
- CLERK, enrolls court records, 47; of the market, 119, 158 note.
- CLOTH, 132; of Coventry, 253-258, 302; drapers, merchants of, 257; dyers, great makers of, 243 note; dyeing of, 265 note; Florentine, 356; makers of, 241, 243, 276; manufacture of, 63; illicit market for, 242; sale of, in drapery, 254, 255; seahing of, 256, 257 note; trade in, decays, 254 note; weaving of, how paid, 278; *see also* Drapery, Frieze.
- CLOTHIERS, company of, survives, 281.
- CLOTHMAKERS, *see* Cloth.
- COCK-FIGHTING, 328.
- COCKET bread, 295, and note.
- COLCHESTER, 2.
- COLESHILL, 165, 167; pillory at, 289.
- COMBE, abbey of, 16; abbot of, 14 note, 216.
- COMMISSION of array, 352-354.
- COMMON council, 244.
- COMMON labour, 351.
- COMMON lands, commission on, 108 note; enclosures of, 107-110, 412 note, 207, 208, 270; part of, held by Trinity guild, 111, 112; old men testify to the extent of, 216, 217; view of, 112; ploughed up, 198; technical possessors of, 109 note; *see also* Enclosures, Lammas lands, Prior's Waste, Saunders, Laurence, Stint, Surcharging.
- COMMON seal, 113.
- COMMUNES, French, 89.
- COMPETITION, rules against, 271; of outsiders, 300.
- COMPURGATION, 49 note.
- CONIERS, Sir John, 176.
- COOK, Laurence, 144, 310.
- COOKERY in Middle Ages, 335.
- COOPERS, feast of, at Whitefriars, 326 note; fellowship of, 261 and note.
- "CORONALL," left in pledge, 181.
- CORONER, 61, 77.
- CORPUS CHRISTI, eve of, 334; procession on feast of, 340; *see also* Pageants.
- CORPUS CHRISTI guild, *see* Guild.
- CORRODY, 66 note.
- CORVESARS, 335.
- COUNCIL, great, held at Coventry, 163, 164; *see also* Mayor's Council, Prince of Wales.
- COURT, of the royal household, 133; of statute merchant, 303, 304 and note; special, for trial of craftsmen, 263; *see also* Leet, Portmannote.
- COURTENAY, family of, 148.
- COVENTRY, bishops of, Blythe, 143; Durdent, 25, 35; Livesey, 22, 23; Meulong, 29, 30; Nunant, expels monks from Priory, 23-25; Pucelle, 1a, 25, 26; elections of the, 25-30;

- burgesses of, and Lynn, protest against confiscation of guild lands, 201; cathedral of, 6, 7; used as a hospital in plague time, 320, 321; *see also* Charter, Mayors, Recorders.
- CRAFTS**, combinations of, suppressed, 265 note; companies of, now existing, 280, 281; special courts of, 269, 270; discontent of, 270; feasts of, 335, 336; fines paid by, 264 note; fines exacted for admission to the freedom of, 272, 273 and note; no general fellowship of, 260 and note, 261; men of, fill municipal offices, 259, 260 note; power of corporation over, 262, 263; rules of, overlooked, 262 and note; *see also* Apprentices, Cappers, Dyers, etc., Pageants.
- CROSS**, market in Cross Cheaping, 291, 355.
- "CROWN" inn, 307.
- "CRY," mayor's, 295, 296.
- CUCKING** stool, 239.
- CUNDUITS**, 293.
- CUSTOM** on food, 107; on wool, 243.
- DANDY**, chief justice, 123.
- DANES**, 3, 347, 348.
- DARTMOUTH**, 176 note.
- DAUBERS** and rough masons forbidden to form a fellowship, 279.
- DEMESNE**, ancient, 43.
- DESPENSE**, 55; plot to destroy by witchcraft, 67.
- DIETLACRES**, 33.
- DISSOLUTION** of the monasteries, 200.
- DOMESDAY** Survey, Godiva's estate mentioned in, 31; size of towns recorded in, 31 note; Prior's-half not mentioned in, 32.
- DOOMSDAY**, drapers' pageant, 166, 345.
- DRAPERS**, apprentices to, pay fines at the sealing of their indentures, 273 note; chapel of, 326 note; influence of, 257, 258; fill municipal posts, 260 note; overlook searchers of cloth, 256; propose to overlook dyers, 259, 265 note; survival of company of, 281; pay men to ride in armed watch, 339.
- DRAPERY**, cloth sold in, 241, 254, 299; ordinance for sale of cloth in, 242; belongs to Trinity guild, 95; drapers live in neighbourhood of, 298.
- DRAYTON**, Michael, 1, 7.
- DROGHEDA**, 301 and note.
- DUBLIN**, 301 note, 304.
- DUEL** of Bolingbroke and Mowbray, 130, 131.
- DUGDALE**, Sir William, attributes the *Ludus Coventriae* to the Grey Friars, 344.
- DUNSTABLE**, 53, 326 note.
- DYE**, French, 263, 301; sold at Southampton, 308.
- DYERS**, men of, ride in armed watch, 339; chapel of, 326 note; cloth-makers, 243 note; combinations of, 259, 265 and note; fill municipal offices, 260 note; payment of, to minstrels, 349; petition against abuses of, 265 note; treatment of, by corporation, 264-268; *see also* Journey-men, Saunders, Laurence.
- DYSENTERY**, 138.
- EADRIC** Streona, 3.
- EARL'S-HALF** of Coventry, 32, 56; manor of the earls of Chester, 32; becomes a royal manor, 70; *see also* Prior's-half.
- EDGOTE**, battle of, 179, 290 note.
- EDUCATION** widely diffused in Middle Ages, 316.
- EDWARD I.**, 63.
- EDWARD II.**, borrows from citizens, 63; supports prior, 64; plot to kill, by witchcraft, 67.
- EDWARD III.**, 72.
- EDWARD IV.**, appeal made to, 124; citizens embrace cause of, 171; citizen's give welcome to, 172; confiscates franchises, 188; flies to Low Countries, 184; interferes with right of arrest, 122-124; plots of Warwick against, 178, 181; a prisoner in Coventry, 180; war between, and Warwick, 186-188; visits Coventry, 174.
- EDWARD V.**, as prince of Wales, appeal to, made by Laurence Saunders, 222; arbitrates in Bristowe's case, 235; born, 185; corporation entreat mediation of, 192; member of guilds, 191; oath of allegiance taken to, 191; reception of, 189-191.
- EDWARD the Confessor**, 4; charter of, to monastery, 5, 6.
- EDWARD**, prince of Wales, son of Henry VI., 184, 188.
- ELEPHANT**, city seal, 256, 318.
- ELIZABETH**, queen, visits Coventry, 1, 202; sees Hox Tuesday plays, 347, 348.
- ELIZABETH**, queen of Henry VII., 197, 341.
- ELIZABETH** Woodville, 185, 191.
- EMPSON**, Richard, *see* Recorders.
- ENCLOSURES**, award, 109 note; commons rise to break into, 198; list of, presented by Saunders, 225, 236; of Prior's Waste, 212; *see also* Common Lands.
- ETHELNOTH**, archbishop, 7.
- EVESHAM**, 7 note, 14, 15, 18.
- EXETER**, 182; Vespasian at, 2; cathedral of, 319; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note.

- FAIR, grant of, 52; of Coventry, 300; 301, 302-305; of Stourbridge and Winchester, 301.
- FEE-FERM, 77, 94, 200; in arrears, 126, 127; paid by Trinity guild to prior, 96.
- FENDS, family, 148.
- FINEUX, chief justice, 251.
- FIRE, protection against, 292, 293.
- FISHMONGERS, 283, 298; "foreign," 294.
- FLEET prison, 251.
- FLORENTINES, 16 note.
- FORD, William, merchant, founds almshouse at Grey Friars', 312.
- FORESTALLING, 294, 296, 297.
- FORTIFICATION of Coventry, 151, 152, 352.
- FORTY-EIGHT, mayor's council of, 113-115, 355; *see also* Mayor's Council.
- Foss Way, 13.
- FOTHERINGAY, 177.
- FRANKLEDGE, view of, *see* Leet.
- FREEDOM of the city, loss of, 121.
- Fresco in Trinity Church, 323.
- FRIARS, Grey, 52 note, 326; habit of, 295; Isabella protects the, 129, 130; plays acted by, 341 note, 344 note; *see also* Bredon.
- FRIEZE of Coventry, 253.
- FULBROOK, castle of, 145, 146.
- FULLERS, craft of, 241, 253, 281; chapel of, on Gosford Gate, 326; guild of, 264; adopt special mark, 263; two appointed searchers of their fellows' workmanship, 255, 256.
- GALLOWES, 289.
- GAMING, 329, 330.
- GAOL, 289.
- GATES, closed at nine o'clock, 284.
- GAVEL-PENNIES, 33.
- GIRDERS, 266-268; chapel of, 324 note.
- GLOUCESTER, city of, 171.
- GLOUCESTER, duke of, Humphrey, 149, 305; loan demanded by, 144; present made to, 145, 146.
- GODEKNAVE (or GOODKNABUFF), John, cooper, 261 and note, 262.
- GODIVA, buried at Coventry, 6; dies, 11; founds and endows Coventry Priory, 3, 5; estate of, 31 and note, 32; employs goldsmiths, 7; honour paid to, 3, 4; procession, 10; legend of the ride of, 7-10, 243, 245; window in Trinity Church commemorating, 8, 9; *see also* Leofric.
- GOLDSMITH, 7; of Bruges, 309.
- GOODE EVE; *see* Godiva.
- GOSFORD Green, common land, 109; duel to take place on, 131; hermitage at, 286; lord Rivers beheaded on, 180, 290.
- GRACE, John, disturbance caused by preaching of, 140, 141.
- GRAUNTPREE, William, suit of, with prior, 64, 65.
- GREVILLE, Sir Fulk, 329.
- GREY, Walter de, election of, as bishop of Coventry, 27-29.
- GUILD of S. Anne, founded by journeymen, suppressed, 97, 276, 277.
- GUILD of S. Catherine, priests of, 92; union with Trinity guild, 93, 94.
- GUILD, Corpus Christi, 90, 97, 277; chapel of, 93; charity of, 32, 33; church of S Nicholas supported by, 201 note; feasts of, 336; and Trinity guild governing body of town, 95; members of, and municipal office, 96; composed of Priory tenants, 95; and Corpus Christi procession, 340; petition for recovery of property of, 201 note.
- GUILD of S. George, founded by journeymen, suppressed, 97, 277.
- GUILD of S. John the Baptist, founded and builds church at Bablake, 92; members of, 92; union with Trinity guild, 93-95.
- GUILD Merchant of S. Mary, founded, 73, 91; connection with S. Mary's Hall, 93; masters of, early mayors, 93 note; trade question pretext for foundation of, 91; priests of, 92; union with Trinity guild, 93-95.
- GUILD Merchant formed by Priory tenants, 61, 62; no trace of, as aggregate of crafts, 260.
- GUILD of the Nativity, founded by fullers and tailors, 264; pageant of, 344.
- GUILD of Holy Trinity, character of, 90; and Corpus Christi injured by formation of other guilds, 97, 277; governing body of town, 95; encloses common lands, 111, 112; feasts of, 336; and fee-ferm, 94 note; pays ferm to prior, 111; master of, 96, 98, 102; and Corpus Christi procession, 340; pays schoolmaster, 316; union of, with other guilds, 93-95 and note.
- GUILDS, "frith," 89; rise of, 89, 90; suppression of fresh, in Coventry, 97; suppression of, and chantries, 200.
- GUY of Warwick, 13.
- GUY'S Cliffe, 168.
- HADDON, John, draper, 324; lends money to clothiers, 258, 313.
- HALES, John, 254 note; letter of, to protector Somerset, 200.
- HANSEATIC League, 310, 355, 356.
- HARCOURT, Sir Richard, brawl between, and the Staffords, 332-334.

- HAWKING**, 331.
HEARSALL common, 109.
HELL-MOUTH, 346.
HENRY II., 35, 46.
HENRY III., 129.
HENRY IV., 138.
HENRY V. visits Coventry, 139, 341; loan to, 138, 139.
HENRY VI., 148, 149; visits Coventry, 153-157, 161-163, 164, 167; warns men of, against treachery, 169, 170; men of, turn against, 172; released from Tower of London, 184; *see also* Church, Margaret of Anjou.
HENRY VII., 237; visits Coventry, 195, 307, 341; appeals for loan, 196.
HENRY VIII. visits Coventry, 346.
HERBERGEORS, 306.
HERRERT, lord, 179.
HEREFORD, 165; general assembly of citizens of, 88; aulnage of county of, 254 note.
HERESY, court of, 143.
HERMIT, Grace the, 140, 141; in Coventry, 286.
HEROD, character of, in *Mystery Plays*, 345.
HERTFORD, size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note.
HINCKLEY, 304.
HOLY cake, 82 note, 103 note.
HOSPITAL of St. John the Baptist, 320; *see also* Almshouse.
HOSPITALITY, monastic, 305.
HOSPITALLEERS, 320.
HOX Tuesday plays, 347, 348.
HURT, William, 124-126, 251 note; appeals to Kingmaker, 125.
HUGENOT silk weavers, 204.
HULL, 301 note, 315 note.
HYTHE, condition of, 292.

"IKELTON" collar left in pledge, 139.
IMMORALITY, punishment of, 290 and note; mayor to refrain from, 101.
INDENTURE tripartite, 75.
INNS, 305-307; blind, 330.
INQUISITION on convent property, 73.
IPSWICH, 84 note, 88; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note.
IRELAND, 12 note.
IRON, workers in, abuses of, 266-269; Spanish, 302.
ISABELLA, queen of Edward II., inherits the Earl's-half, 70; feud between, and the prior, 70-72, 73-75; protects the Grey Friars, 129.

JAMES I., 203.
JAMES II., 204.
JEWS in Coventry, 52.
JOHN, 23; forces his candidate on chapter, 26-29.

JOURNEYMEN, cappers, making of caps by, forbidden, 280; working hours of, 279-280; card-wire drawers, 269; dyers, forbidden to work for certain masters, 266; attempt to form a guild, 279; guilds of, *see* Guilds; rules of, 278-279; suppers of, 336; tailors, 276-277; weavers, 277-278, 342 note.
JURY of presentment, 43, 50.
JUSTICES of the peace, 93 note.

KENILWORTH, abbot of, 216; castle of, fortified, 159; prisoners kept in, 189; royal visits to, 164, 192, 347; siege of, 129.
"KING of Prussia, Old," inn, 306.

LADY chapel of S. Michael's, 93, 322; of Trinity, 93.
"LAMB and Flag" inn, 307 note.
LAMMAS day, 198, 218, 247.
LAMMAS lands, when opened, 107, 108; settlement of, by award, 109; *see also* Common Lands, Enclosures.
LANDOR, Walter Savage, 7.
LANEHAM, 347, 348.
LANFRANC, 19.
LEET, court of, or view of frankpledge, 50 note; jurats of, 98; business of, 102; petitions to, 115-117, 266; presentments at, 117, 118; profits of, 77.
LEICESTER, 153, 172, 186; bailiff of, 33; men of, rebel against Henry II., 36; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note.
LEICESTERSHIRE, 142.
LEOPRIC, buried at Coventry, 6; founds and endows Coventry Priory, 3, 6; family of, 10, 11; sees vision, 4; *see also* Godiva.
LEOMINSTER, 7 note.
LEPROSY, 37.
LETTERS patent forbidding the formation of new guilds, 97, 276.
LICHFIELD, 13; title of bishopric of, 204; canons of, feud with monks of Coventry about episcopal elections, 16, 25, 26, 28, 29.
LIGHTING of streets, 284.
LINCOLN, bailiffs of, 99; freedom of, 52 note; Coventry liberties modelled on those of, 44, 45, 66.
LIVERY and maintenance, Henry VI. warns men of Coventry against, 157.
LOANS to royal persons, 138, 139, 143-145, 181, 198; of Sir Thomas White, 314.
LOLLARDRY, 136 note, 142.
LONDON, 80, 82 note, 298 note, 311, 313; division of, into various estates and jurisdictions, 57; precautions against fire in, 292 note; lazar-

- house in, 37; S. John's eve in, 336, 337; schools in, 315; sympathy of men of, with other towns, 55, 68 note; Tower of, 33.
- LUDLOW, castle of, 222, 225, 235; *miserere* seat at, 297, 298.
- "LUDUS COVENTRIÆ," 341 note, 344 and note.
- LULLABY, 349, 350.
- LUTTERWORTH, 136.
- LYNN, 184; burgesses of, protest against confiscation of guild lands, 201; guild of, 95 note.
- MACE, 165.
- MAINTENANCE, 121.
- MANCHESTER, abuses of the victuallers in, 106 note.
- MARESHALL, Robert le, informer, 66, 67.
- MARGARET of Anjou, queen of Henry VI., men of Coventry, turn against, 172; Coventry called "secret harbour" of, 147; reception of, at Coventry, 160-162; visits Coventry, 164, 165, 166; sees *Mystery Plays*, 133, 166, 341; is reconciled to Warwick, 183.
- MARISCO, Richard de, 20, 27.
- MARKET, held in Prior's-half, dispute about, 64, 65; rules for regulation of, 298-300.
- MARLBOROUGH, 46 note, 128.
- MARMION, of Tamworth, 34.
- "MARPRELATE, Martin," 303, and note.
- MARSHALL of the royal Household, 133 and note.
- MARY, Queen of Scots, 202.
- MASONS, 261 note, 279.
- MATILDA, queen of Henry I., called Godiva, 11.
- MAXSTOCK, 143; castle of, 149, 150.
- MAYOR, arbiter in disputes among craftsmen, 263, 264; cap of, 105; supports discontented "commons," 198; duties of, 103, 104; fee of, 104; attends mass, 101; overlooks rules of crafts, 262 note.
- MAYOR'S Council of Forty-Eight, 113, 114; tyranny of, 114; Saunders expelled from, 244; of Twenty-Four, 9.
- MAYORS of Coventry: Bette, John, deprived of civic sword, 188; Cook, Laurence, 214; Deister, John, sword borne behind, 247; Dove, John, 247, 248; Green, Robert, 245; Onley, Sir John, Henry VII. lodges with, 194, 195; Saunders, William, 177; throws open Bristowe's fields, 210, 211, 213, 214; Stoke, Richard, 87; Strong, John, 115; Ward, John, 86; Wyldegrys, John, 169.
- MELTON, 43.
- MEMPRIC, founder of Oxford, 2.
- MERCERS, craft of, apprentices of, 273 note; chapel of, 326 note; company of, survives, 281 note; fill municipal posts, 260 note.
- MERCHANT Adventurers, 356.
- MERCHANTS, 300, 301, 302, 305; of Coventry, attend council, 63; families of, 307-311; manage municipal affairs, 85 note, 262.
- MEREVALE, abbey of, 14; abbot of, 216.
- MILITARY duties of citizens, 351-354.
- MINSTRELS, 348, 349.
- MONASTIC life, 16-22; officers, 16-18.
- MONKS, of Coventry, receive charters, 5, 6, 32; dispute with bishops, 22-25; with canons of Lichfield, 25, 26, 28, 29; with men of Coventry, 60-67, 70-72, 73-75, 227-232; with Grey Friars, 327, 328; with Isabella, 70-72, 73-75; as landlords, 30.
- MONTALT, Roger de, lord of Earl's-half, 59, 60, 129 note.
- MONTFORT, Simon de, 54.
- MORTMAIN, license to evade Statute of, 91, 92, 94.
- "MOTHER of Death," 345.
- MUNICIPAL authorities, power of, 82, 83; institutions, decay of, 79, 80; Reform Act, 81.
- MYSTERY plays, see Pageants.
- NECROMANCY, see Nottingham, John de.
- NEVILLE, Sir Humphrey, 180.
- "NINE CONQUERORS," 162.
- NOBLES, feudal, 33; grant charters, 41.
- NORTHAMPTON, 122, 167, 169; battle of, 170; men of, owed money by Henry III., 132; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note; earl of, 204.
- NORWICH, 83 note, 119; dispute between prior and men of, 55 and note; court leet at, 48 note; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 note.
- NOTTINGHAM, 298 note; castle of, 27; receives customs on pattern of Coventry, 45 note; court leet at, 117, 118; men of, dispute with their rulers about common lands, 111; victuallers in, 106 note.
- NOTTINGHAM, John de, necromancer, 66-68.
- "OBITS," 325.
- ONLEY, family of, 309.
- ONLEY, 179, 180 note.
- ORDEAL, trial by, 51.
- OSENEY wine, 296.
- OVEN, feudal lord's, 42, 43.

OXFORD, 2; fair of S. Frideswide's at, 303.

PAGEANTS, Corpus Christi, actors employed in, 342, 343, 345; of cappers, 345; cardmakers, etc., 261 note; crafts required to contribute to, 116, 341, 342; of crafts distinct from those performed by Grey Friars, 341 note; the *Ludus Coventrie* not to be identified with Coventry cycle of, 344 note; of drapers, 166, 345; of dyers, 339 note; of mercers, 344, 347; of shermen and tailors, 344, 349, 350; of smiths, 116, 345; royal spectators of, 341; stage property of, 346; stations of, in streets, 343 note; of weavers, 342 note, 344; for reception of royalty, Arthur, prince of Wales, 346; Edward, prince of Wales, 189, 190; Henry VI., 346; Margaret of Anjou, 160-162; Princess Mary, 347.

PAINTERS, 261 note.

PAKMAN, Simon, prior's bailiff, attack on, 71, 92.

PARK, LITTLE, 140; martyrs burnt in, 143, 290.

PARLIAMENT "unlearned," 137; diabolical, 168.

PAVEMENT, 282 and note.

"PEACOCK" inn, 307.

PEASANT Revolt, 87.

"PEEPING TOM," 7 note.

PERCY, 148.

PEWTERERS, 239, 240.

PILATE, character in Mystery Plays, 345.

PILGRIMS, 286, 287.

PINNERS, 260, 261 note; feast of, 326 note.

PISFORD, William, 312.

PLAGUE, 291.

PLAYERS, strolling, 329.

PLYMOUTH, guild at, 95 note.

PODDY Croft, common land, 112.

POLESWORTH, nunnery at, 3; S. Edith of, 34.

POPE, appeal to, by an exiled monk of Coventry, 24.

POPULATION, of Coventry, 200; at *Domesday*, 31.

PORTMANMOTE, court of, 45, 46, 60 note; proceedings of, 47-50.

PORTMOTE, *see* Portmanmote.

POULTERERS, 299.

PRESTON, 43 note.

PRINCE of Wales, lord of the Earl's half, 70, 203; council of, 192; *see also* Edward V., Henry V.

PRIOR, 60, 141, 221, 316; suit between, and burghers, 64, 65; quarrel between, Isabella and the men of Coventry, 69-77.

PRIORS of Coventry: Brighthelton,

William of, purchases Earl's-half, 59; Deram, dispute between, and the corporation, 227-232; Geoffrey, 21; Ireys, Henry, 64; plot to kill by witchcraft, 67; Joybert, and king John, 26-28.

PRIOR'S-HALF, of Coventry, 32, 56.

PRIOR'S Waste, 218, 224; made over to the monks, 212.

PRIORY, fortified by Marmion, 34; Henry VI. lodges at, 154.

PROCESSION, of royalty, 156, 165; on midsummer eve and S. Peter's night, 337-340; at Corpus Christi, 340, 341.

PURVEYANCE, 131, 132.

PYPOWDERS, court of, 44.

READING 3, 43 note; abbot of, and townsmen dispute, 54 note.

RECORDER, 154 note.

RECORDERS of Coventry: Boteler, Henry, 157; death of, 237; disgrace of, 102, 238; opposes Laurence Saunders, 224; pleads for city's liberties, 123, 124; quells tumult, 233; Empson, Richard, 196, 197, 238, 247; Littleton, Thomas, 157, 214; greets Henry VI., 154; Swillington, Ralph, 324.

"RED ROSE" inn, 307.

REGGATEY, 294; of brewers, 297.

RESURRECTION and Descent in Hell, cappers' pageant, 345.

RICHARD II., 323; forbids duel, 130, 131.

RICHARD III., 192, 194; sees pageants, 192.

RIVERS, earl, 184; guardian of prince of Wales, 222.

RIVERS, lord, 162, 163; beheaded on Gosford Green, 180.

ROBIN of Redesdale, 176, 179, 209.

ROCHESTER, bishop of, Thomas Savage, 248.

"ROEBUCK" inn, 307.

ROGER of Wendover, 8, 9.

ROOD, of Bronholme, of Chester, 286.

ROUS, John, antiquary, 168.

"ROYAL OAK" inn, 307.

SADDLERS, 261 note, 326 note; journey-men, of London, 278.

S. ALBAN's, battle of, 158, 159, 171; men of, rebel against abbot, 69; monks of, 20.

S. AUGUSTINE of Hippo, 7.

S. GEORGE, Coventry birthplace of, 190 note; chapel of, 326 note.

S. JOHN the Baptist's eve, 334, 336-340.

S. MARGARET, character of, welcomes Margaret of Anjou, 162.

S. MARY's Hall, 111, 199, 215, 227; and the guild merchant, 93; tapestry in, 156; window in, 355.

- S. NICHOLAS' Hall, 95 note.
 S. OSBURG, 3; shrine of, 286 note.
 S. PAUL'S cathedral, London, 197.
 S. PETER'S Eve, *see* S. John the Baptist's eve.
 S. THOMAS' chapel, 324.
 SALISBURY cathedral, 319.
 SAMSON, character of, welcomes Edward IV., 172.
 SANCTUARY, right of, 134, 135.
 SANITATION, in towns, 290-292.
 SAUNDERS, Laurence, dyer, 96 note, 273 note; made chamberlain, 220, 221; champion of discontented craftsmen and commonalty, 219, 245, 246; complains of the enclosure and surcharging of the common lands, 222-226, 236, 346; imprisoned, 237, 244, 252; member of the Forty-eight, 238; seditious speeches of, 243; trial of, at Ludlow, 227; in the Star Chamber, 251.
 SAUNDERS, Laurence, martyr, 290.
 SCHOOLMASTER, at Coventry, 315, 316; paid by Trinity guild, 316.
 SCHOOLS, general before the Reformation, 315.
 SEALING of cloth, 256, 257 and note;—of weights and measures, 295.
 SEVERN, river, navigation of, 308.
 SHARPE, Jack, rising of Lollards under, 142.
 SHERBOURNE, river, regulations against throwing refuse into, 103.
 SHEREMEN, *see* Tailors.
 SHERIFFS, 133, 304 note; bribery of, 105; county court of, 50, 51; Henry VI. promises to make, 157.
 SHIP-MONEY, 203.
 SHOPS, 64 note, 283 note.
 SHREWSBURY, countess of, 148, 167.
 SHRINES of saints, 286.
 SILK industry, 204.
 SIMNEL bread, 295 note.
 SMITHS, craft of, 339; abuses of, 266-269; chapel of, 326 note; fines demanded by, for admission to freedom, 273 note; journeymen of, 269.
 SOAP, making of, 63 and note.
 SOLTHULL, 134 note.
 SOMERSET, duke of (the younger) retainers of, and city watch, 163.
 SOMERSET, duke of, protector, 200, 201.
 SOUTHAMPTON, 308; size of, at *Domsday*, 31 note.
 SOWE, Richard, killed by witchcraft, 67.
 SPAIN, 311.
 SPICER-STOKE, 298.
 STAFFORD, Sir Humphrey, brawl between and the Harcourts, 332, 333.
 STAMFORD, 132, 176 note; division of estates in, 57 note.
 STAPLE of Calais, assist Edward IV., 182; John Onley of Coventry, mayor of, 309; monopoly of wool trade, 175, 257.
 STAR Chamber, 251, 252 note.
 STEPHEN, king, 35.
 STEWARD, *see* Town Clerk.
 STINT of cattle on pastures, 108 note.
 STIVICHALL, 35; common at, 109.
 STOCKS, 288, 289.
 STOKE, common at, 109.
 STONELEY (mod. Stoneleigh), abbey of, 14; abbot of, 216; monks of, 303.
 STOURBRIDGE fair, 301, 302.
 STOWE, antiquary, of London, 336.
 STEALSUND, 310.
 STRIKE of journeymen, 278.
 SWANSWELL Pool, 13 and note, 229, 230.
 SWIFT, John, tiler, 261 note, 262.
 SWINE, of S. Anthony's Hospital, 283 note.
 SULBY, prior of, 303.
 SUMPTUARY laws, 101 note.
 SURCHARGING of common lands, 223, 224.
 TABLES, draughts, 330.
 TAILORS journeymen of, 276; and fullers, 264; and sheremen, pageant of, 344.
 TAMWORTH, 34.
 TANNERS, craft of, 344; abuses of, 239.
 TAPESTRY, 156.
 TEWKESBURY, 27.
 THOMAS, monk of Coventry, 28; pleads with the pope for the exiled monks, 24.
 THORNTON, William, window of, 355.
 TILERS, 260, 261 note, 326 note.
 TOLL, 5, 308; Coventry free from, 8, 243; charter conferring freedom from, 72, 73; at Southampton, 308, 309.
 TOWN clerk, Boteler, John, and steward, 226, 232, 234, 250, 252.
 TOWTON, battle of, 171.
 TRAVELLING, frequent, in Middle Ages, 301.
 TRIAL and Crucifixion of Christ, Smiths' pageant, 315.
 TUMBRIL, 289.
 VAGABONDS, sturdy, 317.
 VESPASIAN visit of, to Exeter, 2.
 VICTUALERS, 106 note; abuses of, 107, 293-298.
 WAKEFIELD, battle of, 171.
 WALKERS, *see* Fullers.
 WALLS of city, begun, 87; dismantled, 204.

- WALTER of Coventry, 17 note.
 WARD, Joan, martyr, 143.
 WARDENS, 242; duties of, 104.
 WARDS of the city, meeting of men of, 110 note, 113.
 WARWICK, 187; size of, at *Domesday*, 31 and note; castle of, 13, 199; Leicester Hospital at, 202.
 WARWICK, earl of, Beauchamp, 141, 143.
 WARWICK, earl of, Richard Neville, the King-maker, 123, 172; appeal made to, by Huet, 125, 126; plans to raise Clarence to throne, 175; fomented rebellion, 176, 181; keeps Coventry against king Edward, 186, 187; letter from, to Coventry, 177, 178; marriage of daughters of, 177, 178, 183, 184; Edward IV., prisoner of, 180.
 WASTEL bread, 295 note.
 WATCH, 285, 351; fray between and Somerset's retainers, 163.
 WATLING Street, 12 and note.
 WEAPONS, carrying of, forbidden, 331.
 WEAVERS, craft of, 241, 242, 253; apprentices of, 271; journeymen, 277, 278; searchers of cloth, 255; cloth of, searched; 263; pageant of, 344.
 WELLS, cathedral of, 310.
 WELSH road, 2 note, 12 note.
 WESTMINSTER, abbey of, 3, 4, 15, 185; abbot of, 22; judicial courts at, 250.
 WHEATLEY, founder of school at Bablake, 311.
 WHITE, Sir Thomas, 313, 314.
 "WHITE Hart" inn, 307.
 "WHITE Rose" inn, 307.
 WHITLEY, common at, 109; Brislowe encloses land at 207-208; meadows at, thrown open, 210-212; suit concerning, meadows at; 213-18, 234-236.
 WHITTINGTON, Sir Richard, 311-312.
 WICKLIFFE, 136.
 WILLIAM I., 3, 20, 32.
 WINCHESTER, 2, 57, 58, 205; fair at, 58, 132, 301; men of, receive customs after pattern of Coventry, 45.
 WOODBURY, guild at, 89.
 WOODVILLE, John, 180.
 WOOL, 15, 16, and note, 223, 301; trade in, 175, 257; ball, 242, 243, 254, 299.
 WORCESTER, aulnage of, 245 note; monastery at, 7 note; earl of, Tip-toft, 123, 185.
 YORK, 2, 31 note, 119; men of, 248 note; Mystery plays at, 344; archbishop of, George Neville, 179, 184; duke of, Richard, 155, 164, 170.

INDEX TO GUIDE

(Chap. XVI.)

- ANNUNCIATION, 368.
 ASSUMPTION, 366, 371.
 BEAM in S. Michael's Church, 367.
 BOND John, 365.
 BOND's Hospital, 376.
 BORONER, family of, 362; William, 374.
 CATHEDRAL ruins, 375.
 CHAIR of State, 369.
 CHAPEL, cappers', 364; drapers', 365, 366; mercers', 364-365.
 CHARTER of Rannulf, 368.
 CHURCH, of Christ, 361; of S. John Baptist, 375; of S. Michael, 362-367; Holy Trinity, 374.
 "DANCE of Death," 366.
 DAVENPORT, Christopher, 361; John, 360.
 DUGDALE, Sir William, 360.
 FORD's Hospital, 361.
 GOSFORD Green, 358.
 GRAMMAR School, Old, 375.
 GUILD of the Holy Trinity, S. Mary, S. John Baptist, and S. Catherine, 367.
 HENRY VI, 369, 371.
 KITCHEN, 363.
 LANTERN, 363.
 LECTERN, 374.
 MARGARET of Anjou, 371, 372.
 MAYORESS's Parlour, 369.
 MINSTREL Gallery, 370.
 MISERERE seats, 365, 366.
 MONUMENT Room, 368.
 MUSICAL Instruments, 370.
 "PEEPING TOM," 375.
 PERCY, John, 368.
 PULPIT, 374.
 ROOF, of the drapers' chapel in S. Michael's, 365; of S. Mary's Hall, 370.
 S. GERTRUDE of Nivelles, 372.
 S. MARY's Hall, 367-374.
 SAUNDERS, Laurence, martyr, 360.
 STEEPLE, 362.
 SWILLINGTON, Elizabeth, 364.
 TAPESTRY, 370-373.
 THORNTON, William, 370.
 WANLEY, Humphrey, 360.
 WARD's tomb, 364.
 WHEATLEY, 376.
 WHITE, Sir Thomas, 359.
 WHITEFRIARS, 358.
 WINDOW, in S. Michael's, 366-367; in S. Mary's Hall, 370.

